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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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# LEO HAMALIAN:

## Mr. Eliot's Saturday Evening Service

Probably one of Mr. Eliot's most explicit statements of his purpose in *The Cocktail Party* was made in 1932: "Psychology has very great utility in two ways. It can revive, and has already to some extent revived, truths long since known to Christianity, but mostly forgotten and ignored, and it can put them in a form and language understandable by modern people to whom the language is not only dead but undecipherable. . . . Psychology is an indispensable handmaid to theology."[1]

Ironically enough, some of Mr. Eliot's own words were turned against him: many critics called *The Cocktail Party* dead and undecipherable. In fact, one critic wished that even Mr. Eliot were dead. Even those reviewers who felt the vitality of the play admitted that much of it was obscure, difficult, and probably esoteric as well, and I believe there is some truth in this admission. But I also believe it is true that too many critics have neglected to take adequate account of the symbiotic relationships in Mr. Eliot's works. In this paper, my aim is to illuminate the text of the play by showing how it is related to, and grows out of, ideas contained in his poems, essays, and other plays.

In stating the theme of the play, we may use with relevancy lines from another Eliot verse drama, *The Family Reunion:* "What we have

[1] *The Listener,* March 30, as quoted in Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry,* p. 7.

written is not a story of detection, /Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation" (II,ii). Virtually excluding Christian terms from the dialogue, Eliot develops a familiar theme: for certain individuals, the imitation of Christ leads out of the impasse of the waste land. The less fortunate must learn to live in it. The three-fold way of self-surrender, self-control, and sympathy[2] is the first step in the release from obsession with self ("Hell is oneself" — Edward) and with secularism. But before the salvation may begin, the individual must become aware of suffering born of sin and isolation. This "sense of sin," Reilly tells Celia when she meekly confesses to it, is most unusual. After such a confession, absolution may follow. The penitent seeking grace must "become the instrument of God . . . lose his will in the will of God . . . [find] freedom in submission to God."[3] For those who lack the spiritual resources necessary for travelling such an arduous road, the life of "common routine" in "a world of lunacy" can be a good and acceptable one. Twelve years have mellowed the Eliot who said over the radio in 1937: "To accept two ways of life in the same society, one for the Christian, one for the rest, would be for the Church to abandon its task of evangelising the world." Nevertheless, we are reminded by Reilly's insinuations that, although both ways of life may be equal, Celia's way is a little more equal.

The title suggests significance on more than one level. The cocktail, a modern concoction, is the adulteration of the water of life with a baser substance. It stultifies the senses — at any rate, so believes Charles in *The Family Reunion:* "It's the cocktail-drinking that does the harm: /There's nothing on earth so bad for the young. /They've lost their sense of taste and smell/ Because of their cocktails and cigarettes"(I,i). It may also symbolize the adulteration of divinely-sanctioned love by an intruding affection. Lavinia and Edward, one kept and the other a keeper, have broken sacred vows of marriage. Their love for each other dead, the ghost of Gerontion groans a dirge over the ashes of it:

> I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
> Since what is kept must be adulterated?
> I that was near your heart was removed therefrom . . .
> I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch . . .

---

[2] This parallel to the final section of *The Waste Land* is suggested by Arthur Zeiger in the August *Tomorrow*.

[3] *Murder in the Cathedral,* pp. 49-50.

Since adulterer Edward and adulteress Lavinia have met their partners in sin over earlier cocktails, the cocktail-party becomes the mise-en-scène of the *mélange adultère de tout.*

Eliot's statement, "Anglo-Saxons display a capacity for *diluting* their religion,"[4] gives credence to a third implication: the party is a frieze of a world in which faith has been thinned into vapidity by materialism. Like the Chamberlaynes' whiskey, the spirit has been adulterated, and as a consequence, "we're all of us ill in one way or another" *(The Family Reunion,* I,iii). Evidently the cocktail party is a microcosmic representation of a macrocosm dying painfully of the blight of secularism[5] — a macrocosm about which the wind shall say: "Here were decent godless people:/Their only monument the asphalt road/And a thousand lost golf balls" *(The Rock).* To the nervous tinkling of cocktail glasses and the noiseless bouncing of golf balls, the Chamberlaynes and their kind approach "the inevitable moment of disillusion" (the phrase is Mark Van Doren's). The cocktail goblet is ironically the holy chalice of London society, and the cocktail procession is the setting for it, the symbol of "the human condition," of "the final desolation/Of solitude in the phantasmal world/ Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires"(II).

The opening scene, as in *The Family Reunion,* is laid in the drawingroom. The conversation is aimless: words revolve like ancient women gathering fuel in vacant lots. In this twittering world of Lady Klootzes, Tony Vincewells, and Delia Verinders, empty shuttles weave the wind. Indifference competes with inanity as "the endless palaver" (*The Rock*) swoops from one banality to the other.

It soon becomes clear that men seek false chalices, that the land is waste, and that a saint must restore it. The possibility that Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* may have suggested the incidental symbolism for the play does not seem so fanciful after one has re-read parts of the book. By way of reminder, I have summarized some of her contentions. In "The Secret of the Grail," she says that pre-Christian religions had exoteric rites, celebrated openly and by all members; and esoteric rites, open to only a few initiates, the object of which was non-material and perhaps union with God. As exoteric

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[4] *The Idea of a Christian Society,* p. 23.

[5] ". . . a negative condition of society must either proceed into a gradual decline of which we can see no end, or . . . reform itself into a positive hope which is likely to be effectively secular." *Ibid.,* p 23. In "Religion and Literature" Eliot has defined secularism: ". . . concern . . . only with changes of a temporal, material, and external nature."

rites became public feasts, the mystery rite took on added significance: it became the vehicle for imparting the highest religious teaching. In an earlier cult, the rites were divided into two classes: the little mysteries, or those of the flesh; and the greater mysteries, those of the spirit. After practicing the little mysteries, men were instructed to seek initiation into the Great Heavenly Mysteries.

In "The Medicine Man," Miss Weston explains the evolution of these dual rituals. Under the process of insistence upon the inner and spiritual significance, the dramatic ritual of the Aryans took upon itself a more complex and esoteric character. The rite became a mystery, and with this change, the role of the principal actors became of heightened significance. That of the Healer could no longer be fulfilled by the mere administration of a medicinal remedy; as the relation of Body and Soul became of cardinal importance for the drama, the Medicine Man, whose original role was identical with that of his modern counterpart, gave place to the healer of body and soul: his task of healing involved more than the mere administration of the original herbal remedy. As the fulfillment of the promise of the Mysteries from the world's beginning, the Christian doctrine of sacrifice and rebirth assumes a universal validity for the Christian, concludes Miss Weston. To Eliot, concerned with giving his drama overtones of "a sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together,"[6] such a conclusion would doubtlessly be attractive.

The characters of the play seem to form two trinities: Edward, Lavinia, and Peter, who are involved in the little, physical, exoteric mysteries; and Julia, Alex, and Reilly, who are involved in the great, spiritual, esoteric mysteries. The members of the first group are concerned with little more than the natural world; at their worst, they are stonily indifferent to the spiritual and seek physical pleasure; at their best, they are nominalists who believe, as someone said of Santayana, that there is no God, but that the Virgin Mary is His mother. However, they are not beyond a kind of redemption. After socialized religion, in the guise of psychiatry, has healed their wounds, these people will:

> Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
> Become tolerant of themselves and others,
> Giving and taking, in the usual actions
> What there is to give and take. . . . (II)

[6] "Tradition and Individual Talent," *Selected Essays*, p. 4.

Endowed with some mysterious power, the other trinity wanders "in the neutral territory between two worlds" (*The Family Reunion,* II, iii). Removing their first-act masks while the others sip cocktails, the holy three partake of sacred libations in an exalted communion, both to speed Celia on her journey and the Chamberlaynes on their recovery.

As well as performing the tasks of the modern medicine man, Reilly performs the ancient task of the medicine man in the fertility ceremony, that of restoring to health the suffering representative of the vegetative spirit, who is always young, handsome, and sacrificed, and in some cults, transfigured into Aphrodite. In Reilly, Eliot has joined the psychiatrist, minister of the new religion, to the priest, minister of the old religion, proving, as he once wrote, that two can live as one, as well as one as two, and two as three. The ballad of One-Eyed Riley (which, by the way, seems to have no connection with Joyce's *Ballad of Persse O'Reilly*) somehow relates him to Julia, who wears glasses with only one lens. When she returns to look for them, the Unidentified Guest promptly identifies himself and uncovers his tie to Julia by singing the ballad that concludes with: "What's the matter with One-Eyed Riley?" Although we never learn what the matter is (unless he is half-blind), Reilly is, amusingly and paradoxically enough, the only character of the play to assume the position on the analytical couch. Pursuer instead of pursued, Reilly appears to be less anguished than Harry of *The Family Reunion,* and because of his catalytic role in mundane affairs, more worldly than Becket. Although all three men have visions, Reilly's function recalls that of Agatha, Harry's college-principal aunt who gives advice, rather than that of either Harry or Becket. Agatha, whom Harry calls "liberated from the human wheel," melts into Reilly just as the one-eyed merchant melts into the Phoenician sailor in *The Waste Land.* For example, when Edward cannot decide what to do about Lavinia's departure, Reilly says: "The one thing to do/ Is to do nothing. Wait." In *The Family Reunion,* Agatha tells Mary: "At this moment, there is no decision to be made;/. . . You and I, Mary,/ Are only watchers and waiters; not the easiest role"(I,ii). A more striking similarity is between Reilly's: "We must also remember/That at every meeting we are meeting a stranger" and Agatha's ". . . Meeting is for strangers/ Meeting is for those who do not know each other." Agatha calls Amy "voracious for what you cannot have/Because you repel it" (II,iii). In his consulting room, Reilly characterizes Lavinia in similar words.

Reilly's advice to Lavinia: ". . . Only by acceptance/ Of the past will

you alter its meaning"(III) is reminiscent of Agatha's to her family: ". . . the future can only be built/Upon the real past. . . ." (*The Family Reunion,* I,i), and both have their parallel in the Krishna passage of *The Four Quartets.* Agatha warns Harry: ". . . To rest in our own suffering/ Is evasion of suffering . . ."(II,i), which may throw light on Reilly's admonition to Celia: "Disillusion [suffering] can become itself an illusion [evasion]/ If we rest in it"(II).

In describing the path to purgation to their charges who have decided that saintliness is next to godliness, Agatha and Reilly show further kinship. Agatha says to Harry:

> . . . . This is the beginning of the second way.
> We do not pass twice through the same door
> Or return to the door through which we did not pass.
> I have seen the first stage: relief from what happened
> Is also relief from the unfilled craving. . . .
> You have a long journey. *(The Family Reunion,* II,ii)

Reilly hints at the way out of a "world of lunacy" when Celia asks to be cured of "craving for something" she cannot find, "and the shame of never finding it":

> The second way is unknown, so requires faith —
> The destination cannot be described . . .
> You will journey blind. But the way leads towards possession
> Of what you have sought for in the wrong place. (II)

If Attis-Adonis may become Aphrodite in Jessie Weston, then Agatha may become Reilly; and the Orestean Harry, who is going away to become a missionary[7], may become Celia, who also goes away to become a missionary. Describing his own destination and duty, Harry also describes Celia's:

> Where does one go from a world of insanity?
> Somewhere on the other side of despair.
> To worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation.
> A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
> The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
> A care over lives of humble people,
> The lesson of ignorance, or incurable diseases. (II,iii)

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[7] Actually, it is Harry's mother who says that he is going to become a missionary (II, iii). Harry denies any such intention, but the description of his journey seems to belie his denial. At the end of this passage (quoted in part above), he says, "I must follow the bright angels." The word "angel" derives from the Greek *angelos,* a messenger. Missionary (from L. *missio,* to send) means, of course, a messenger of God.

Why do Harry and Celia choose this "terrifying journey"? Both of them have had what Harry calls the "sudden comprehension of the death of hope." Harry confides to Mary: "Whatever I hoped for/ Now that I am here I know I shall not find"(I,ii). In a passage that swiftly and strikingly culminates the second act, Celia mourns to Reilly:

> But even if I find my way out of the forest
> I shall be left with the inconsolable memory
> Of the treasure I went into the forest to find
> And never found, and which was not there
> And perhaps is not anywhere? (II)

This "death of hope" produces like symptoms. Harry unburdens himself to mother-surrogate Agatha: "I felt, at first, that sense of separation,/ Of isolation, unredeemable, irrevocable . . ./ . . . . That is one hell./Then the numbness came to cover it —that is another—/ That was the second hell of not being there/ The degradation of being parted from my self," etc. (II,ii). Celia confesses about her baffling illness to father-surrogate Reilly. The first symptom is:

> That I've always been alone. That one is always alone.
> The second is a sense of sin . . .
> . . . of emptiness, of failure
> Towards someone, or something, outside of myself . . . (II)

Suffering from a sense of sin and solitude, Harry and Celia seek salvation through further suffering. Like other questers after God — Christ, Piers Plowman, and Grail heroes — they recognize that a combination of the active life with the spiritual life is better than either one.

Celia first becomes aware that she is "lost" during the showdown with Edward. Her dream of love turns into an obscene scrawl on a lavatory wall. Under the shock of discovery, she does not flinch from the shattering truth. Whatever else she may be, Celia is honest and fearless. When the Chamberlaynes are stripped to their little souls in the healing session, we see that they are self-deceivers. Once undeceived by Reilly about their condition, they may face and endure one another again in joyless and sterile sanity.[8] Now convinced that their illness is as common as their personalities, they return with patched-up psyches to a bleak and visionless existence of countless cocktail parties. On the other hand, Celia's determination to pursue her vision at any

[8] I had time for only a hasty glance at William Arrowsmith's article in the Autumn *Hudson Review*. His suggestion that Lavinia may be pregnant in the last act is ingenious, but based on skimpy evidence.

cost makes it impossible for her to return to her former life. She chooses the quest for the Grail. Guided into the mysteries of the spirit by her medicine-man Guardian, she passes stern initiation tests at Chapel Perilous (called "the sanitorium" in the play) and eventually surpasses her guardians in divine grace. An ant-hill replaces Golgotha as the scene of her crucifixion, and the natives who once held monkeys in veneration now hold Saint Celia in veneration.[9] As their conversion begins, her existence ends. Released from action and suffering, she achieves the *Ehrebung* of "Burnt Norton." By giving of herself in sacrifice, she symbolizes the mystery that reveals also the way of redemption from sin. Her final exaltation is described by Alex against a background of the world to emphasize the contrast between her choice and the Chamberlaynes'. She has apprehended the point of intersection of the timeless with time, "an occupation for the saint," through "ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" ("The Dry Salvages," V). Even though saints are made, the making is part of a design. Becket preaches to his people in the cathedral: "A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God" (The Interlude). Reilly says of Celia: ". . . . She paid the highest price in suffering./ That is part of the design"(III).

Alex stirs memories of Jessie Weston's ardently religious Syrian merchants who bring news of the Death to the outside world ("Where on earth [did I turn up from] ? From the East"). Hollywood directors are his friends in the West, and monkeys are his friends in the East: he bestows the favors of his friendship with perfect detachment. An expert cook of fish, eggs, and monkeys; wiseman of the East; traveller of the world, he is also the guardian of Peter.

Similarly, Julia's primary appointment is to protect Lavinia, although she looks after Celia as well until the time she leaves the English hearth for the Kinkanja heath. It is Julia's telegram that recalls Lavinia to the home she never left; it is at Julia's behest that Reilly undertakes to restore Lavinia's broken marriage. Guardian of the hearth, she keeps a watchful eye on Lavinia's home and husband. In public, she deliberately assumes the guise of a frivolous female in order to mask her function as a sybil. She is "always right," says Celia. Calmly but compassionately, Julia speaks of the

[9] In her prologue, Chaucer's Second Nun gives an enlightening interpretation of the name Cecilia, of which Celia is the diminutive. "Through good teaching she was an example for all; Cecilia is a compound of 'heaven' and 'Leah.' " (Both Leah and Celia were second wives.)

terrors of Celia's journey. When Reilly asks her if Celia will be frightened by it, she gives an answer both wise and understanding, one that makes ridiculous the charge that she is "a tedious old harpy." If Julia's public behavior (as well as Alex's) seems inconsistent with a private personality, we might seek explanation in Eliot's comment on the verse play: "It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency."[10] Not the fool she appears to be, Julia tells Reilly: "We must always take risks./ That is our destiny . . ." While she shuttles back and forth between two worlds, Julia Shuttlethwaite takes the risk of being mistaken for a witless old gossip. Both of them one-eyed, together Julia and Reilly perceive reality in unique fashion, not as clearly as Celia, but far more clearly than Peter and the Chamberlaynes. The hierarchy has been established. "Everything is in order," says Julia.

Peter Quilpe is interestingly related to Alex. While wanderer Alex meets saffron monkeys in his travels in the East, wanderer Peter dines at the Saffron Monkey in his travels in the West. A worshipper of art, Peter is seduced by Hollywood, perhaps the symbol of modern commercialism in art, and there transfers his worship to the great god Szogody.[11] Alex, with connections in Hollywood, merely helps him to fulfill his destiny. Peter "should go far," Reilly says,—"along his own lines." What they shall be is plain, for Peter comes back to England for the purpose of studying and reproducing Boltwell, "the most decayed noble mansion in England still inhabited." Boltwell begins to look suspiciously like the True Church, and Peter like a tinhorn version of The Rock, come to rebuild the *physical* structure of the decaying edifice. Placed against the backdrop of *The Rock*, ("And the Church must be forever building, and always decaying, and always being restored"), Peter's mission becomes a travesty. While Celia is washed white as snow, the True Church remains below, wrapped in the miasmal mist, but nevertheless beckoning to expatriate script-writers and providing models for Hollywood.

Alex deliberately crosses Peter's path again two years after Celia's renunciation of the flesh to tell him that she is beyond the reach of Hollywood.

Edward Chamberlayne is a slightly altered, English version of J.

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[10] As quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, p. 155.

[11] Is a pun similar to one on the name of Madame Sosotris intended? That is, a so-so God?

Alfred Prufrock, the attendant lord (chamberlain) who grows old and who sees himself as others see Edward — as a fool. The English Alfred practices the little law, offspring of a once great law, and plays cribbage instead of chess while the world is being raped by secularism. Middle-aged and mediocre by his own admission, incapable of belief or of love, he is condemned to fast in the fires of marriage for the remainder of his natural life. His bitter complaint during the domestic battle with Lavinia: "There was a door/ And I could not open it. I could not touch the handle./ Why could I not walk out of my prison?" (I,iii) reminds one of Prufrock's paralysis and the opening lines of "Burnt Norton": "Footfalls echo in the memory/Down the passage which we did not take/ Toward the door we never opened."[12] When Peter, who has been timidly wooing Celia with teas and concerts, comes to him for advice, Edward is too weary to do more than repeat Reilly's. In the separation scene that follows, Edward sadly admits to Celia that he is "beginning to know what it is to feel old," to know "the dull . . . implacable spirit of mediocrity." His words raise the spectre of Gerontion again, who is also "an old man, a dull head among windy spaces." Edward is saved from Gerontion's corner, for he can say two years later:

> Now I think I understand . . .
> Oh, it isn't much
> That I understand yet! But Sir Henry has been saying
> I think, that every moment is a fresh beginning;
> . . . that life is only keeping on;
> And somehow, the two ideas seem to fit together. (III)

Compare this with Charles' awakening at the end of *The Family Reunion:* "I am beginning to feel, just beginning to feel/ That there is something I *could* understand, if I were told it./ But I'm not sure that I want to know. I suppose I'm getting old . . . ," and to "East Coker": "For the pattern is new in every moment/ And every moment is a new and shocking/ Valuation of all we have been. . ."

Edward calls his wife an "octopus" during their spat. If she is one, she operates from her home base, we may see by going, as Lavinia does not, to Lavinia's aunt. Non-existential, the aunt is even less substantial than John and Arthur of *The Family Reunion,* who also never put in an appearance. The depths of Essex, where the aunt does not live, represent the mysterious, remote places to which Lavinia never

[12] Also cf. *The Waste Land,* ll. 411-415.

ventures — she hovers around home or hotel. It is her appointed burden, Reilly informs her near the end of the play, to entertain cocktail guests, to celebrate the little mysteries of public life against the public background which Edward supplies. Despite her rehabilitation by Reilly, she remains as spiritually unlovable as Shakespeare's heroine of the same name (in *Titus Andronicus)* is physically unlovable.

Julia sums up the action of the play:

> Everyone makes a choice, of one kind or another,
> And then must take the consequences. Celia chose
> A way of which the consequence was crucifixion;
> Peter Quilpe chose a way that takes him to Boltwell;
> And now the consequences of the Chamberlaynes' choice
> Is a cockail party. They must be ready for it. (III)

Celia's choice establishes a Little Gidding on Kinkanja.

The play, like *Finnegans Wake* and the Book of Ecclesiastes, has circular movement; history repeats itself, or as Harry expresses it, "the things that are going to happen/Have already happened." In the last scene of *The Cocktail Party,* when Peter says that his career is finished, Lavinia replies: ". . . You've only just begun." When Harry says to Agatha: ". . . this is like an end," she responds: "And a beginning." Celia's decision to begin a new life prompts Reilly to pronounce in the words of Christ: "It is finished," referring no doubt to her former existence. At this point of the play, the perception of Mary in *The Family Reunion* seems strangely appropriate:

> I believe the moment of birth
> Is when we have knowledge of death
> I believe the season of birth
> Is the season of sacrifice . . . (I, ii)

*The Cocktail Party* ends with: "It's begun." This reconciliation of opposites takes one back to *Murder in the Cathedral*'s ". . . the wheel may turn and still/Be forever still" and ". . . from generation to generation/ The same things happen again and again," as well as to the opening line of "East Coker": "In my beginning is my end," and the final line: "In my beginning is my end"; and to a couplet from "Little Gidding": "What we call the beginning is often the end/And to make an end is to make a beginning." As F. O. Matthiessen expressed it, in my beginning, in my birth, is implied my end, death; yet, in the Christian reversal of terms, that death can mean rebirth. Eliot is concerned with religious continuity as well as with individual

history. In the final scene of the play, the time is two years later and all save Celia are back at another cocktail party in the same place. As Lavinia observes, the cycle begins again.

To three random but apparently bothersome questions, I should like to propose tentative answers. Why does Reilly drink gin and water? He and the Riley of the ballad are the only figures who do not drink cocktails. Gin and water, unlike cocktails, cannot be smelled on the breath, a consideration important to both psychiatrist and priest, although not necessarily important to a one-eyed ballad-singer. Of the components of Reilly's drink, gin is a whiskey obtained by redistilling spirits with flavoring agents, especially the fruit of the juniper, a tree that has sacred connotations in *Ash Wednesday*.[13] Water, of course, also has a sacred meaning to Eliot.

Do the names of the characters have special significance? To an over-alert mind, they suggest some curious relationships. Peter and Alexander are Greek names; Lavinia and Julia are Latin names; Harry and Edward Germanic in origin. Edward (a lawyer) means protector of property, Henry the guardian of the enclosure; Alexander means the protector of man, Peter a rock. In another part of this paper, I spoke of the appropriateness of the names Chamberlayne, Shuttlethwaite, and Celia.

Why is the play called "a comedy"? There is little in it, some critics to the contrary, to associate it with the drawing-room comedy of Wilde or the 18th century, and even less, despite many intensely comical moments, to invoke the standard definition of comedy. It is of course a Dantesque comedy: for the central character, it begins in misery and ends in happiness. Starting from hell on earth, Celia passes through purgatory to paradise (Dante: "the purpose of the whole Comedy . . . is to remove those who are living in this life from the state of wretchedness, and to lead them to the state of blessedness." *Epistle ad Can Grande*).

What Eliot said about the plays of Shakespeare in *The Use of Poetry* seems to fit his own play: "For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and the conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually."

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[13] Celia undergoes a transformation similar to that of the protagonist of *Ash Wednesday*. He renounces the sensual aspects of love, and without discarding the emotion, expands its spiritual area. Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

# SANDRA WOOL:

## Weston Revisited

Although enthusiastic, the reviewers, thus far, have talked about Eliot's *Cocktail Party* as if it were Oscar Wilde's with a dash of bitters by C. S. Lewis. Their blessings fall on its Wildeness; came the coos of satisfaction because there was not enough Lewis to spoil anyone's secular evening and not more Lewis than they could, with polite and professional good taste, refrain from discussing as laymen. Most of the reviews mention "a third level" in passing, either ambiguously, as if this were a catch-all for the eccentric something-more an Anglo-Catholic and a poet might have to say and for which their newspapers couldn't supply sufficient space for paraphrase, or laconically, as if "the third level" were slightly obscene and should be recognized as discreetly as possible. The play seemed, above all, to the reviewers "simple," "straightforward," "drawing-room comedy," " a comedy of manners" and "good theater": these epithets seem to point to bastard-Eliot. The most casual reader — observing the nameless stranger (Reilly) turn into the all-knowing psychiatrist with god-like powers, observing the clownish world traveler Alex and the silly aging butterfly Julia turn into saint-like ministers of the god-psychiatrist, observing the martyr-destiny of the *ingénue* Celia, reading the incantation that closes the second act, reflecting on the curious nomenclature of the characters — must be aware that a "mystery" is intended. And since "nobody likes to be left with a mystery" (Edward Chamberlayne's complaint in the opening scene of the play), I would suggest an appropriate (indeed, to readers of Eliot, a familiar) interpretation of the play's symbolic values via Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*.

The full artistic and intellectual function of Eliot's *dramatis personae* becomes available only when his characters are translated into terms of their equation with the *dramatis personae* of the Weston nature-myths. In the Frazer tradition, Weston describes a ritual structure, common to all the pre-Christian Nature and Fertility Cults and inherited by Christianity. She emphasizes rite over dogma as the persistent element in religion. She assigns the origins of the Grail material — the Waste Land, the Fisher King, the Hidden Castle with its Feast and Feeding Vessel, the Cup and the Lance — to the old vegetation religions. Their precise divine significance lost, these

ritualistic fragments and other folk-practices, ceremonies and seasonal celebrations were absorbed into Christianity, where they remained with a kind of nebulous spirituality as signs of a "mystery." As Eliot indicated in his Notes to *The Waste Land,* he used the Weston thesis as the scaffolding for that poem — namely, in dealing with the ritual aspects and figures of Christianity, priest, templar, seer, he drew on their earlier historical personalities which Weston presented. It seems to me he has done this again, without the formal footnote, in *The Cocktail Party:* here he uses both *From Ritual to Romance* and his own interpretation of that book, *The Waste Land.*

*Edward Chamberlayne* (the Fisher King). In the ritual of the Nature Cults, the King is identified with the divine principle of life and fertility. The prosperity of the people correlates with the physical and spiritual condition of their king; the misfortunes of the land as the Grail story opens directly reflect the impotence of the aging king. In *The Cocktail Party* we are concerned with the fortunes of the Chamberlaynes and their guests. As host, as dispenser of food and water (of cocktails, olives and potato crisps), Edward rather obviously fills the role of king. Julia even mentions the fact that Edward is so much the host (again the responsible king) that he can never be a guest at his own parties. Edward appropriately bears the name of kings. In terms of the action, the well-being of Peter, of Celia, and of Lavinia rests on Edward's condition. Edward's age is stressed early in the play when Peter begs him to intercede with Celia because he is "so much older." Edward talking to Celia intensifies this theme:

> only since this morning
> I have met myself as a middle-aged man
> Beginning to know what it is to feel old.

He proclaims his own senility: to Celia that he has lost "The desire for all that was most desirable"; to Reilly that he is afraid of the death of his spirit, and that he is incapable of making decisions. He plays Patience, a sign of decrepitude noticed in *The Waste Land* and again, as in *The Waste Land,* he hears his errant wife letting herself in with the latch-key.

The pattern of action in the Grail-legend — the self-wounding of the king, as a result of the treachery of one of his knights; his healing; and the rejuvenation of the land — is repeated in the Chamberlayne household. Edward's and Lavinia's domestic war-of-nerves is a long-indulged-in war of attrition, at once mutually and self-afflicted; however, it calls a crisis in each of their lives, a crisis of the ego. "I have

ceased to believe in my own personality . . . I must find out who I am," Edward tells Reilly. Lavinia's disaffection (suggesting the treachery of the prototype knight) forces Edward for the first time to take cognizance of his misery, of a wound too great even for a mistress, if not his wife, to heal. Lavinia's departure precipitates Edward's self-knowledge (the self-wound): that he is perhaps not capable of loving. In her absence, Edward first becomes actively aware of his inhuman dryness, which Celia also will later comment upon.

The death of the treacherous knight is the condition of expiation and rejuvenation in the Grail story; the Chamberlaynes are rehabilitated more gently. When the Chamberlaynes leave Harcourt-Reilly's office, they are changed. They betray a symptom of health: they have made a choice. They will take up the burden of living and loving and "Breeding children whom they do not understand" (recalling "Breeding lilacs out of the dead land"). In the final act Edward's solicitude for Lavinia's weariness hints the approaching fruition of restored fertility. Like the kings in some versions of the Quest, "who, by a symbolic act, escape the final penalty of sacrifice as representatives of the Dying God," the Chamberlaynes escape. Their symbolic act, the "reconciliation to the human condition," is secular and exoteric, yet this act like the mystic one wins grace. "It is a good life" — the Chamberlaynes bring juvenescence to the waste land.

*An Unidentified Guest, later identified as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly* (The Quester and Medicine Man). In delineating the role of the Quester, Weston places the chief emphasis on the Quester as Healer. His task is two-fold: to benefit the king, then the land. As Quester and Healer, Harcourt-Reilly first sets the Chamberlayne house in order, then turns to Celia and finally to Peter. Like the traditional Quester, Sir Henry cures by posing the right questions. Eliot never specifically calls Harcourt-Reilly either a psychologist or a theologian; his ambiguousness has a precedent in Weston where the Medicine Man has a complex character. There he unites the functions of priest and healer, distributes herbs and chants soothing rhymes; he is a man of wealth and probably a Brahmin. Reilly sings "One-Eyed Riley" in the first act and recites "Ere Babylon was dust" in the last; he is already rather obviously a man of means, a Harley Street doctor, and titled. The Quester, according to Weston, is always the unidentified guest, and the Healer was often referred to as "this mysterious personage" in recognition of the unknown breadth of his powers.[1]

[1] Harcourt Reilly, Medicine-Mystery Man, also includes Tiresias of *The Waste Land* as well as the classical seer. Cleanth Brooks has called the blind prophet "the historical

*Alexander MacColgie Gibbs* (Templar). Weston records the earliest Sword Dancers (and Alex carries a walking stick) as "gold-bedecked" "armed youths," and suggests that the Knights Templar are their lineal descendants. Alex's association with Harcourt-Reilly foists his religious function upon Eliot's audience; however, it seems to me Alex as a priest becomes plausible only when he is viewed as the Templar, the gay dancer-descended warrior-priest. Like the Crusader, Alex has connections all over the world and like his namesake the Macedonian, he is a cosmopolitan diner and buyer. A connoisseur, he brings his own champagne to the Chamberlaynes. He appears as the administrator in Kinkanja, aiding the Bishop with conversation, serving the sisters by filing an interim report of their martyrdom. He advises Edward infallibly on shops and "a doctor" and seems related to "the one-eyed merchant" of the Tarot pack, who becomes the Phoenician Sailor, another Citizen of the World.

But Alex's high civilization must not be allowed to blur his essentially religious role: although he denies shooting tigers, he is twice charged with such sport. Even his passion for cookery is enlisted in the war against "the adversaries" of the Christian God

> The young monkeys are extremely palatable:
> I've cooked them myself . . .
> I invented for the natives several new recipes.

With Julia and Reilly, Alex guards the Grail.

*The Guardians of the Grail* (Julia, Alex, Reilly). Splendid half-gods half-clowns, Julia, Alex and Reilly form a music-hall trinity shepherding the Chamberlaynes and Celia and Peter toward grace. As fervently secular as Alex — she steals cigarettes, does her meditating on lifts which she prefers to run herself and is always famished — Julia is a special female divinity for Lavinia and Celia. Gossip and gad-about and "Lady of Situations," Julia possesses the badge of the conspirators' heightened vision: one-eyed spectacles. "Among primitive peoples," Weston says, "dance holds a position . . . which, in more advanced communities, is assigned to Prayer" and it is probably only in the early Morris dancers that the Guardians find their counter-

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'expert' on the relation between the sexes"; Reilly fulfills this function in the play. He not only arbitrates the carnal problems in the play, but perceives and describes the "two lives," the two loves — the secular and the mystic.

It is significant that the future which in *The Waste Land* is left to a "wicked pack of cards" of a clairvoyante with an all-too-human bad cold, should in *The Cocktail Party* be dealt with in the impeccable Harley Street offices of Sir Henry, the Quester, the Healer, the Priest. Perhaps Reilly is "the man with three staves," three realms of power. Mme Sosostris "is known to be the wisest woman in Europe," Eliot wrote with obvious irony; by contrast and no comment, such wisdom is almost attributed to Reilly.

parts, partaking at once of the divine and the comic. Like the Morris dancers with their appurtenances — the sword impaling a cake, a stick with a bladder, a money box, an animal skin — the mimic Julia sports her purse and an inevitable umbrella and on the stage swings an extravagant fur-piece over flamboyantly colored dresses; Alex has his walking stick; they and Reilly manipulate taxis and telephones and telegrams and service-entrances with careless omnipotence. The Guardians alone were exempt from the wasting concomitant with the Fisher King's deterioration: they come from another world. Having transcended the flux of the human condition, they maintain throughout the play the not quite human gaiety of dancers. Like the Morris Dance, their meetings end in a ritual, half toast half benediction.

*Celia Coplestone* (Saint and Hanged God). Weston divides Mystery into two orders: the little Mysteries of Fleshly Generation and the Heavenly Mysteries. Celia suffers martyrdom twice. The first time she is reviled by Lavinia and Edward, and even Peter tries to forget her; while she desperately tries to recapture her lover ("Jug Jug" to dirty ears) and gain evidence of the reality of her mind's illusion of their love, the sacrifice prepared by the Templar burns. If this was the Eucharist, Celia was not yet worthy to taste. In her second martyrdom Celia will furnish the Sacrament with her own body. The sense of aloneness and the sense of sin are part of the process which transhumanises Celia's desire. Her words to Reilly a few weeks later mark the metamorphosis: the death of the woman and the birth of the saint, the decay of the flesh and the flowering of the mystic.

Although Celia is clearly Christian — consider her Spenserian name, her *Magna Mater*-like compassion for Edward's childishness, her imitation of the passion of Christ — she is also the young, beloved and beautiful god of the Attis-Adonis worship who is destroyed and is reborn in the spring. Reilly calls both the Chamberlaynes' and Celia's destinies good. The mutual dependence of these widely deviating roads of journeying is apparent also in the Weston text. The community of the Chamberlaynes still lacked the heavenly "copestone." The esoteric side of the ritual is satisfied, when Celia is resurrected in the propitiating offerings of the Kinkanja natives and in the Chamberlayne living-room. Both Lavinia and Edward can now remember her with full love. Although their secular hearts cannot completely understand her sacrifice — the mediating task is the Guardians' — they recognize her divinity. It is right that they, the Fisher Kings, the life-force, should not fully comprehend the saint's destiny, for the saint's destiny in temporal terms is always the fool's destiny. In Act I

Edward feared humiliation and the contempt for the fool from his neighbors; Celia accepted the fool in herself. Indeed she shows a peculiar affinity for the third brother in Julia's story, the brother whom the family "kept . . . rather quiet" because he could only repair clocks (the saints and the fools can be objective about time) and hear the cry of bats (voices). The birth of a child, not the death of a martyr, is the image behind Lavinia's chair.

*Peter Quilpe* (the Apostle). I have called Peter, the one who "has not yet come to where the words are valid," the Apostle because he denied the saint as did his New Testament namesake: in California he tried to forget Celia. More important, because he is the one in the play who is most nearly the martyred goddess' lover — Edward was in an imaginary sense only. Peter's description of his love for Celia adumbrates her own words about her feelings for Edward. Both describe human love at that extreme limit, just before it becomes divine and disembodied. Celia grows beyond human passion; Peter's course is persistently secular. However, both Celia and Peter journey to jungles at opposite ends of the world. Peter's jungle like hers is replete with monkeys and heathens — the Bologolomskys and Szogodys — although the East and West are as far apart in time and spirit as in space. As Celia retired to the Grail Castle, Peter too found himself a castle, Boltwell; if a frail mortal thing, it is a castle. Peter will not sacrifice himself to his second-rate metier; still, as Julia points out, the one-eyed of his trade is the sign of their triumvirate. As the play ends, Peter is learning his way slowly toward grace.

The play closes as it opens with a cocktail party, the contemporary social ritual replacing the Weston Mummer's play or Maypole dancing. The cocktail shaker itself seems to be the Grail in its character of a Feeding Vessel, when it "comes and goes . . . and supplies each knight with 'such food and drink as he best loved in the world.'" However, there is still another aspect of the Grail as the Chalice of the Sacred Blood. Only the Guarded Ones — Lavinia, Edward, Celia, Peter — themselves seem to me chalices in this sense. As Weston talks of the cumulative fertility rites, celebrated at appointed and spaced times over a period of days or months, so Eliot refers to a series of parties. The play opens with a cocktail party insufficiently supplied with food and guests, and, most significantly, with the hostess missing and the host absent-minded. Two years later Edward and Lavinia together await more company than their home may hold. The party is catered. The waters the wonderful waters (the gin the whiskey the rye) have been restored to the castle of the Fisher King. Come to a Messianic banquet.

# DEZSO KOSZTOLANYI:

## The Train-Robber

Translator: Agnes H. Allison

He took a seat next to the door in a first-class compartment. He leaned back against the velvety cushions and adjusted his necktie in which a rhinestone tie-clasp sparkled. They lit the lamps. As the cold green light flooded the train, a slight shiver overcame him and his heart pounded more strongly. Here, he thought, was the place where he would have to work tonight, a glass cage where the victim — a poor, blood-smeared canary — would struggle for his life, quietly, without a scream.

For a while nobody came. Men and women passed the compartment, occasionally looked in through the window and then hastened on. Apparently they were afraid of him. He took off his hat and slipped a grey silk stocking-cap over his bald head. Now he looked like a cordial country druggist.

Ten minutes later the doorhandle squeaked. A pale, frail, blonde little woman came in, followed by a porter who deposited two pigskin bags in the net.

"Good evening," said the woman in a low voice.

"Good evening," said the stranger without even looking at her.

The woman — with a trace of mistrust — retired to the window. She must have been around thirty, a quiet, suffering country gentlewoman. Despite the diamond rings on her fingers, it could be seen that these hands had at one time peeled potatoes and scrubbed floors with coarse brushes. The stranger watched every piece of jewelry with the eyes of a serpent. At least three thousand *korona's* glittered on the woman's hands and neck. On her temples — like the lines of marble — blue veins shone through her thin, fine skin.

The train wheezed and coughed and grumbled. Doors slammed, and shouts announcing departure could be heard. Just then, there appeared on the platform a young man, red-faced and blond-haired; a meek, bespectacled boy who waved up to the first-class compartment, right to the stranger. He smilingly returned the greetings. That was the way they had arranged it yesterday. The young man got an honor-

arium of one *korona* and fifty *filler's* for coming to the evening train and posing as his son. For the stranger was a scrupulous, overly cautious man. He knew that robberies had to be prepared psychologically as well as technically and that he had to rouse confidence in his fellow-travellers — his victims-to-be — who surely were peaceful citizens, by a family farewell scene. This scene was a success. The boy jumped on the train at the last moment. According to their arrangements, he kissed him on the mouth, whereupon he kissed him back three times, first on the mouth, then on both cheeks.

"Good bye, son."

"Good bye, dad."

The stranger himself was a bit touched by this ungodly, shrewdly mastered tenderness, and he dismissed the boy whom he saw for the second and last time in his life. Perhaps he even thought of the fact that he never had a wife or children. Anyhow, the one *korona* and fifty *filler* kiss left a queer, tingling feeling on his mouth. Stupidly, he stood around in the passage. He watched the milk-colored fog descend, the tracks, the store-houses, and the trees remain behind. Then he took out his pocket mirror and stepped under an electric light to look at his face. It was yellow and wan, with a slight redness of excitement under the forehead. It was the haggard face of a man of forty, but there was no sign of that devilish insanity which can be seen on the criminal photos in a police album. Would this be the train-robber, the chloroform killer? He was surprised at that himself.

Of course, he had to admit that he was not a real robber, only a robber-to-be. Tonight would be his debut. At present he was just a plain private person with the moist eyes of a dog. The numbered plate of the burglars on his neck would look very bad indeed. And his fingerprints? He pressed his trembling finger to the windowpane. This, too, would appear in the magazines, just like this. He did not like the thought, because — to tell the truth — except for a few flies and a mouse he had not killed anyone yet. Still, with the dark plans in his heart he did not feel like a crook. Instead, he remembered his ex-boss with his hideous beard, his beastly chin, and his upward-combed black hair, the universally respected wild boar who, without full payment, put him in the street in the middle of the winter.

Noiselessly he slipped back into the compartment, closing the door and lowering the curtains. The woman, obviously influenced by the family scene, felt more at home. She had taken off her hat and her coat and was reading a blue book. After the tickets had been checked,

they were left alone. Only a few people were traveling; most of the passengers had gone to bed, and the deaf, searching silence of the night draped over the train.

Such a night train is rather peculiar. It is all noise and clatter, but somehow the noise filters into silence and spreads an infinite loneliness, the kind that can be found only on scorched summer *puszta's* or in haunted castles. For half an hour the name of some station rings in one's ear. *Pusz-ta-szent-péter*. . . . The stranger half closed his eyelids as if he wanted to sleep and thus watched the woman's every move. Gradually he managed to convince himself that she was not a human being, but an object, a task, an obstacle which he would have to remove coldly and carefully. Step by step he strengthened his heart. He needed that. His tools were all ready: in his right pocket, a thin but very strong silk cord, the destination of which he did not yet know; a small bottle of alcohol and a piece of cotton which were to remove possible bloodstains from his fingers; a clean towel, and — finally — in a perfume bottle, chloroform. This, in the right moment, he would spread over the face of his victim. If she screamed, he would grasp her throat with both hands. He trusted his two iron fists.

The woman sat perfectly still at her old place, diagonally from him, so that he would have time and space to jump upon her with a sudden swing, unexpectedly. She was still reading though she hardly turned the pages. Perhaps she was too nervous to stop and look up and tried to numb herself with this motionlessness. Like a tiger, the stranger already enjoyed his bloody success. He could see the silent sure fight, the woman's blue eyes bulging at him, a jagged movement which he would nip in the bud, and, after a short struggle, victory; the helpless, pallid, sleeping body obediently permitting him to harvest all the diamonds, the small mouth turned blue; the hot, fair locks lying disordered on the red velvet, and the pale nose with its panting, nervous nostrils stupefied by chloroform.

He would have to act soon. Any minute now they would reach that long, endless tunnel in which the terrific thunder of the train drowns out every other noise. It was eminently suitable for this operation. As yet he hesitated, but he remained calm; he did not make a move.

All of a sudden the woman jumped in front of him and screamed on top of her voice:

"Help!"

The stranger grasped for his pocket to defend himself, because he

thought the woman wanted to *avert* him. This was impossible, for he had done nothing to betray himself. But in the next moment the woman fell back on the couch and softly, with blue lips gasping for air, she whispered for help. Her left arm hung limply to the floor. Her face looked like that of someone bitten by a snake.

The stranger's heart thumped vehemently, the world was turning with him.

"Excuse me," he stammered and stepped toward her.

Then he regained his breath.

"Do you feel sick, Madam?"

Her mouth twitched convulsively.

"Do you have a headache?"

"No," said a low voice, and the hand pointed to the left breast.

The stranger just stood there, rigid as a statue. He had no idea what to do. He stared at those quiet, imploring eyes which looked at him with the prayer of a dying deer. The stupefying ether in his pocket would not have crippled her this much. So helplessly did his prey lie before him, so unconsciously, that he would have no trouble removing the bracelet, the necklace, and the ring. Why did he not do it?

With much difficulty he tore up the upper window. The cool night air streamed in. This apparently helped the patient; after a few minutes she propped herself on her elbows and mistily looked at her traveling companion.

"Now comes," said the traveling companion, "the tunnel. An ugly, long, black tunnel. Full of smoke and soot. I wish we were past it."

"At last," said the woman and took a deep breath.

"Do you feel some better?"

"Oh," said the patient, whose cheeks began to take on color again, "I just got a bit dizzy. It is nothing, really nothing. Just the usual attack. That's why I have been to Budapest: to see the doctor."

"Have you been sick long?"

"For the past five years. But sometimes it does not show up for months."

"Yes, yes, a little dizziness. This stuffy air — and the nervousness. Nowadays everybody is nervous. Especially the ladies. The blood suddenly rushes to the heart. An aunt of mine suffered from the same ailment. Then she died at eighty. From old age."

The stranger smiled forcedly at this idea and thought with sincere emotion of his aunt who always wore a white dress and who brought

him nutcakes, candied orange peels and raisin cookies when he was a boy. How far away was all that!

"In such cases it is best to sniff at some alcohol," he continued. "By the way, I have some with me. I always bring some along for the road. Now lean back a bit on the couch and inhale deeply. But first let me cover the cushion with this clean towel."

The wind was blowing hard outside. Carefully, the stranger lowered the curtains, so that the patient would get the fresh air without catching a cold. With the strong silk cord in his pocket he tied the corner of the curtains to the brass hook.

The conversation continued.

"Where are you going?"

"To Nagykorpona," said the woman. "And you?"

"So am I."

"To visit relatives?"

"No," said the stranger embarrassedly, "for some other business."

Another pause.

"I wish there was a dining-car on this train," he lamented again. "At least we could get some cognac. But I will get out at the next stop and get a glass full. In such cases that is very good."

It rained darkly and persistently. Shortly, the train stopped at some little nameless station which shiveringly muffled itself into the damp night. With its distant huts, it looked like a cemetery. Here the stranger hastily jumped off the train. He was in such a hurry that he even forgot to take his hat. Bare-headed, he stumbled along in the sooty loneliness between the tracks, stepping into puddles up to his ankles, tripping over every lump of earth and pebble until he reached the station. He found nobody but a sleepy doorman and an indifferent clerk. They sent him from one door to the other, but he could not get any cognac. Finally he had a desperate idea. He dashed up to the stationmaster who was already asleep, rattled off his story, and practically on his knees begged for a bottle of cognac. Please be merciful, it is for a sick woman. The stationmaster, in his nightgown, handed him a bottle through the window.

With the bottle in his hand he staggered back to the train. The rain was lashing him bitterly. His suit and shirt were already soaked, but heaven knows, the cold rain felt good. He stood around in the deluge, fumbling in his pocket. He threw the chloroform bottle into the wet shrubbery. He barely had time to jump on the train.

He handed her the bottle, panting.

"You are so good."

"Oh, no. I'm not good," he said sadly.

The woman sipped from the cognac and then lay down. With tender care the stranger shaded the lamp. He threw a last glance at her and tiptoed into the passage. Inside, the patient was already asleep. She was *his* patient, and this made him feel proud and good. Her face was slightly flushed from the excitement and the cognac, her eyes — those deep, clear, imploring blue eyes — were closed. She breathed evenly and clearly. An infinite happiness filled the stranger's heart. He had never felt anything like this before. Every moment he sneaked to the door to look at her through the narrow opening between the curtains. He was like a father watching the dream of his sick child. So far, everything was all right. Fresh air was coming through the curtains held in place by the silk cord. Alcohol was purifying the air, and the blond head was resting sweetly on the clean towel on the cushion. The chloroform bottle lay forgotten under the bushes of the unknown little station. Who knows who will find it and when?

The dawn was breaking. The greyness of the morning began to shine through the dripping windowpanes. It was a dirty, ugly, sickly morning, yellowish-green, unfriendly and cold, with slimy fog and inky clouds. But the stranger spread his arms like an angel and wanted to fly. His pulse beat hot and fast. He must have caught a cold last night on the wet station. His damp coat and vest were still clinging to his body. His nose was red, and he had a nasty cough. Tears were dripping from his eyes. Incessantly the precious, clean white water, the water of goodness streamed from his eyes, these eternal fountains. He did not know what had happened to him, whether he had a cold or whether he was being sentimental. The train-robber wept bitterly over the fact that he was such a good man, much better than he thought himself to be. Sometimes he wanted to sing an ode to goodness and humanity. But then he always had to sneeze.

Generally speaking, he was a very inefficient robber.

# ODYSSEUS ELYTIS:

## The Body of Summer

Translator: Kimon Friar

It is some time since the last rainfall was heard;
Above the ants and the lizards
Now the sky burns endlessly
The fruit-trees paint their mouths
The pores of the earth very slowly open
And beside the trickling and syllabic waters
A huge plant stares into the sun.

Who is this who sprawls on the far beaches
Supinely, smoking the smokesilver olive leaves?
Crickets warm themselves within his ears
Ants scurry upon his breast
Lizards glide in the long grasses of his armpits
And from the seaweed of his feet a wave lightly passes
Sent by the small siren who sang:

"O naked body of summer, burnt
And eaten by oil and salt
Body of rock and the heart-tremor
Deep winnowing of the willow's hair
Spray of basil on the curly groin
Filled with starlets and pine-needles
Profound body sailing on day!"

The soft rains come, the pelting hail
The shores recede flogged at the fingernails of winter
That with savage billows lowers in the deep
The hills plunge into thick cloud-udders
But behind all this you smile indifferently
And find again your deathless hour
As you are found once more upon the beaches by the sun
And amid your naked vigor by the sky.

## The Age of Blue Memory

Olive-groves and vineyards spreading to the sea
Red fishing-boats farther still to memory
The golden cricket husks of August in the midday sleep
With shell and seaweed. And that boat
Newly built, green, which in the water's peaceful embrace still reads:
*The Lord Will Provide.*

Like leaves like pebbles the years went by
I remember the young men, the sailors, leaving
And painting the sails in their heart's image
They sang of the four corners of the horizon
They wore the North Winds tattooed upon their chests.

What was I looking for when you came painted with the sunrise
The age of the sea within your eyes
And on your body the sun's vigor — what was I looking for
Deep within sea-caverns amid spacious dreams
Where the emotions foamed of a wind
Anonymous and blue, engraving upon my chest the sea's emblem?

Sand on my fingers, I would close my fingers
Sand in my eyes, I would clench my fingers
This was torment —
It was April, I remember, when I felt for the first time your human weight
Your human body of clay and corruption
As on our first day on earth.
It was the fete of the amaryllis — but you suffered, I remember,
The wound on the bitten lip was deep
And deep the nailmark on the skin there where Time is forever engraved.

I left you then

And a thundering wind swept up the white houses
The white emotions freshly washed
Upon a sky that shone with smiling.

Now I shall keep beside me a jug of immortal water
A form of the wind's ravaging freedom
And those hands of yours where Love shall be tormented
And that shell of yours where shall echo the Aegean.

## Marina of the Rocks

On your lips there is a taste of storm — But where have you wandered
Daylong on the hard revery of rock and sea?
An eagle-bearing wind stripped the hills bare
Stripped your desire to the bone
And the pupils of your eyes seized the relay-rod of the Chimera
And traced the memory with foam.
Where has it gone, the familiar ascent of childhood's September
Where on red earth you play, gazing below
On the far meadows of other girls
On corners where your friends left armfuls of rosemary?

— But where have you wandered
Nightlong on the hard revery of rock and sea?
I would tell you to keep trace of its brilliant days in the unclothed water
To lie on your back enjoying the dawn of all things
Or to wander again in fields of yellow
With a clover of light on your breast, O Heroine of Iambic.

On your lips there is a taste of storm
And a dress crimson as blood
Deep within the summer's gold
And the hyacinth's aroma — But where have you wandered

Descending toward the pebbled shore of the bay
Where you found a cold salty seagrass
But deeper still a mortal emotion that bled
And opened your arms in surprise, calling its name
Lightly ascending in the limpidity of the underseas
Where your own starfish gleamed like a star?

Listen, the Word is an ultimate wisdom
And Time is a frenzied sculptor of men
And the sun stands above it, a beast of hope
And you, much closer, embrace a love
With a bitter taste of storm on your lips.

You may no longer count on another summer, O seablue to the bone,
That rivers might turn in their courses
To carry you back to their mother
That you might kiss other cherry trees again
Or ride the horses of the mistral.

Pillared on rock without yesterday or tomorrow
On the dangers of rock wearing the headdress of the storm
You shall say farewell to your enigma.

# JOAN WHITE:

## In Ice Green Hills

When will your birthday come
Under? who sit and bow
Head to a desperate measure —
Lamplighted grapes that fall
Asking upon the cloth —
Or draft a cut of bread
Under the bright knife's swish:
Fortune has worked to this
Measure, trumpeting high
Trumpeting low
Over the ice green hills.

In ambush, ah in capture
Inside a birthday cage,
Engage the motor, gnome,

Own monkey's favorite,
Move smoothly on the cool
Water. Ride and ride
To where immortal seals
Wave flippers down the ice green
Hills; which hold farewells
Imperishable
In echoes' roundelay.

## The Wolf That Was

There was a deer springing off
Soft as truth, when he awoke
Generous from sleek dreams.
Winds blew his new saying,
"Ah, where does evil fly?"
And the pond of good lay jelled
Beside the soft paw he lifted up.

"Ravenous as the sharpened grass,
Forever to let deer run free. Ah,
Where does evil fly?" (Sometimes,
Hidden in a toe nail,
Or hair's disturbed end,
While through the root the sap
Flows frank and unsuspecting.)

Red curtained skies become,
Diminishing,
His taste for blood.

Round him the big bone
Of the cleaned world
Rolls.

# E. E. CUMMINGS:

## Poem

being to timelessness as it's to time,
love did no more begin than love will end;
where nothing is to breathe to stroll to swim
love is the air the ocean and the land

(do lovers suffer?all divinities
proudly descending put on deathful flesh:
are lovers glad?only their smallest joy's
a universe emerging from a wish)

love is the voice under all silences,
the hope which has no opposite in fear;
the strength so strong mere force seems feebleness:
the truth more first than sun more last than star

—do lovers love?why then to heaven with hell.
Whatever sages say and fools,all's well

# JAMES BLISH:

## Caesura

I paid fare on the ice to the woods, where the stones bleed me:
there where I fell from the stoop, I was run down
with the sliver of ice in my palm; and the alley
yard house has grown large where I was stung.
By the mansards I watched the sound of a typewriter winking,
swam away from the red crash. The palings were gone
that contained randy memory's collie, the
locust tree had almost devoured the house.

In the dark I thought to be stone like the city
that so unchanged changed me, not to stay in the knowing
woods but only in mind, mirror and stone. There,
too, every flag lidded spiders, corners
turned themselves, old windows mouthed names, four blocks
of still darkbound summer a petrified funhouse,
closed, for the night. I would buy no more candy,
stone I would stand to confute, wanting nothing.

Thought had paid for that life with my I, for the black-blood tree.
Poor city of ice, I said, to stand mute for nineteen stunned years
waiting for nothing but me and the heat of the summer
bitch memory! What good to be stone there,
better to grow like a turnip, if both must bleed!

## Dies Irae

Flense the rock of our race.
It seethes with us. Let it be hard.
Nothing we will gives reason to
what we do; at the heart's core
is the word.
We are the globe's disease; our
ulcer is ouns,
and our hoard.

The rock will carry, but it will not know
the scintillations of our
wisdom. Then, it will not.
It will boil with joy
when we quit it; but our
joy, not
any joy of the rock,
thought, wound, paprika wine, vermin or bird.

# BONAVENTURA TECCHI:

## The Mules

Translator: Ben Johnson

Up on the *scrimi*[1] along my valley the thaw is beginning to loosen the tight network of knotty, ice-clotted clay so that when you walk you hear a crunching beneath your feet. In these closing days of winter I have been to watch the clearing of wood.

The woods are at the bottom of the valley, and their outer edges touch the point where a raging flood this year uprooted holm oaks and cerris, felled poplars and aspen trees, and left the clay-spattered bushes twisted and convulsed so that even now they appear to look with awe in the direction where the storm passed. Only the axes of the woodmen had brought a small measure of order to the midst of the confusion, for the woodcutters had labored even during the bitterest winter weather: and from the black limbs of the oaks and from the powder blue of the aspens there appeared, almost by surprise, some rows of squared pieces of timber, reddish and pallid-tinted, almost flesh-colored — things alive somehow, nude — among scattered patches of snow and bones of ice.

The clearing is being carried out just where these rows are thickest, near a gulch with water sounding in it; up over the plunging clay valley walls the mules carry what the woodcutters with hatchet and saw had reduced to useful timber during the winter.

Even as an infantryman during the war I had never seen mules this close. I used to see them in the mountains, arriving with the baggage; and I believed them to be mere "things" which belonged to those quartermaster men or to the Alpine troops. They were no concern of mine, and I had other things to think about. Now I was sitting in the midst of a group of mules and mule skinners. It was shortly after noon on a day which, though clear, was somewhat bitter; and both mules and men were eating: fed but slightly, the mules were grouped together with lowered heads near a patch of woods which

[1] In the dialect of Viterbo, from the Italian *scrimolo*, rows of jagged-edged, translucent ridges, wafer-thin and pale white, caused by the erosion of clay, normally ten to fifteen meters in height and about twenty-five meters in length. — *Translator's Note.*

the flood had spared; for the mule drivers there was sufficient bread but little else of substance other than a flask of wine which they passed from one to the other. Only a little foal stood apart, some distance away, tied to a shrub; and I asked why.

The most reliable and, perhaps, the biggest gossip of this proud breed of mule skinners answered me. And since, besides talking, he was given to generalities, before arriving at the crux of his statement he went a long way round with aphoristic explanations, flattering the donkey in me for I did not realize that mules are intelligent as well as stubborn in the manner that the common herd of people believes: the most intelligent that the devil has made. Since certainly the devil and not the Lord had created them, so intelligent, melancholy, and even full of occult black passions were they.

I laughed at these fables, and he related the story of how his mule which was madly in love with the filly had to be kept at all costs from her, especially during the upward climb when they were burdened or during their lightened journey back down the clay. Irritated and not willing to swallow his story, I asked rather how the pitiful beasts, edging along the precipices, were able to carry the long, heavy beams up over the discouraging heights of the great land channels.

"Everything is done," said the skinner, not without a certain sense of importance, as he rose and wiped his mouth with his hands. "You just wait and see."

We moved toward another part of the wood where the clearing had hardly begun. A mule was made to approach a stack of beams already prepared. Two were inflicted on its back — very long ones on a sort of pack-saddle; and with strong, coarse cords they were bound in a manner such that the front ends stood almost erect, higher than the shoulders, the lower ends reaching to its hocks. Then the muleteer, the one who talked so much, shouted, "Go!"

I believed that the animal had to be accompanied, but instead I watched it move off alone, make its way through the small wooded area which divided us from the water, pass the gulch, and take to the clay incline. The mule was sulky; cringingly, almost as though its legs were bound, it proceeded slowly, pawing with its forehoofs, its nose long and low as if it were feeling out the slope and at once closely studying the moist clay. When some distance from our vantage point, we got the impression that something was not going well. The mule came to a dead halt. From this side of the gulch there rose up a chorus of threatening and inciting voices: still the beast did not

move. Two of the drivers started running toward it, cursing and yelling, with upraised sticks. On reaching it, however, the men discovered the mule to have behaved sensibly. Because of the thaw, during the afternoon hours the loam had become damper and the animal's hoofs had sunk so much that the rear ends of the beams just grazed the surface of the earth. The solution for this difficulty recognized, the men loosened the ropes on the spot, retied them with considerable effort, then reissued the order to go ahead.

Following the lead mule was a second, a few minutes behind — a third, then a fourth, a fifth. They proceeded up by themselves, following perfectly the rugged, sloping, and winding path which, only some hours before, a mule skinner had faintly marked out with his hoe. Each mule, after having been burdened with the two terrible weights, went off alone, maintaining the same interval of its predecessors, pausing after a few minutes at the same place where the others had started up; each one remained with its head low, with the same resigned, melancholy, long-muzzled expression, recovering its breath; and all of them, once having caught their breath, reattacked the hill. Thus, seen from below, the march had its even, almost musical rhythm; and, too, it formed a kind of design, the same figures moving and pausing, with their shadows always in the same places, always at measured distances.

I watched admiringly; and I was completely taken by this easy and restful feeling of admiration which the mildness of the afternoon hour was drawing out when, suddenly, something terrible happened.

The lovesick mule, the memory of which had entirely left my mind, at a certain point must have broken the established rhythm of the march. Taking advantage of a small terrace where the loamy, upsloped trail seems to take a rest, the mule had broken away on the clay and passed up over the mule preceding it. To me it seemed a not very important thing, and I almost did not notice it; but just as soon as the mule drivers saw it, those standing nearby began to yell, "Stop him! stop him!" I then saw that there were two men standing on the saddle-shaped heights, there where, after the awful climb, the hill turns to ravine. Those two as well, shouting, with sticks upraised, ran headlong toward the mule which, exercising great strength and ignoring the climb and its burden, managed in the meantime to pass still another mule, a third, and now was approaching the foal. It was the thin young filly, reddish in color, with weak legs (or so it appeared) which, from one moment to the next, I had been afraid I should see

totter on the trail. The mule approached his beloved and I expected a fearful embrace up there over the abyss, when the filly, which evidently did not welcome the mule's love, turned suddenly and with demoniac strength, which no one would have thought her capable of, let loose a couple of kicks so well aimed and so powerful that the other shrank back, starting, and turned.

Something then must have happened which from below we could not make out clearly. Perhaps the filly and the mule were still struggling with each other; perhaps, in the movement and turning, the great beams had become crossed. But a moment later the two beasts had plunged into the chasm, entangled and handicapped by those pointed beams which now, with their sudden flashing, seemed sinister blades: there was an enormous, dark mass which rolled, jolted, stopped in the clay, sought to extricate itself, and then was thrown down amid the sound of cries and thumps. The filly must have died immediately; but from the bottom of the ravine, which we could not now see, the braying of the mule pleading for help began to rise up, a braying that lasted nearly all afternoon, while the other animals remained still and mute at their posts, lowering their heads over the ravine as though aghast.

It was not an easy thing to reach the bottom of the ravine. We had to make a long detour, pass the gulch, scale one of the opposite walls, thread our way down another ravine. And all the while, the mule's cries rose up along the clay walls, resounded through the wandering channels of the *scrimi,* awakened the dogs in distant farmhouses.

Only towards evening did we reach the place where the mule lay: seriously injured, it was impacted in the loam, its head down, its body almost entirely sunk in a sort of loamy fissure in the earth, the two rear ends of the beams still standing upright. Three of its legs were gone. Only when finally one of the muleteers arrived with an ax, and I believed that he would free the beast from the beams, and instead heard delivery of a *coup de grace* to the animal's head, only then did the shadows of the other mules move, they who had remained motionless with their long, intent noses as if waiting to see what would come to pass at the bottom of the ravine.

And in the twilight the mules again took up their slow and cadenced march.

# JO SINCLAIR:

## Night Time

Santina walked slowly, a few steps behind the Sister. In the cold, shadowy corridor the mysterious Christs stood, made of stone, tall as men, the stone eyes glinting like secrets in the dusky halls.

She remembered Hilldale Avenue, at night. The Palace, its entire front seeming to steam with electric light on a summer night. Dark boys and blond boys, all dressed up, their hair slicked back. The boy laughter. The people laughter. The long wonderful stare of men you passed. The fast and slow walk of people on both sides of the street, all the way down to Ninth. She remembered Ninth Street, the pool-room, the Spaghetti House, the delicatessen window full of hanging salamis and the garlic smell as you passed, the drugstore, the Blue Light Cafe dark and secretive-looking from the outside, with the nickel music coming out into the street. She remembered the lumbering, yellow dance of the streetcars, the fast dance of the two solid streams of automobiles and trucks, the gay dance of electric lights in a thousand colors flash-flash in the neon signs.

"This is the mathematics room," the Sister said. She was a shadow, black-robed. She was a cool and distant voice. "The floor must be scrubbed with plenty of soap. Be careful not to stain your uniform, my child."

Then Santina was alone, with the pail of hot water. The black, slithering, sibilant robe was gone. Only the paintings of the saints were in the room now, hung in their smiting colors upon the walls.

"When the bell rings," Santina whispered to the saints, "walk down and wash for me, scrub for me." She crossed herself, whispering it.

Everything was done by the bell. The girls awoke to the gong-gong-gong. They said morning prayers, kneeling at the narrow beds. In the big room, the other girls knelt in front of their beds in the same position, said the same words, their hands clasped with a grip same as Santina's. Sister led the prayers, her robe mysterious as the morning six-o'clock in the room, her robe black as the night out of which Santina had struggled awake.

They put on the grey, striped uniforms. They made the beds, washed themselves. Gong! Prunes and cereal, cocoa, dishes to wash

and dry. Gong! Chapel, drone of voices in prayer. Reading, writing, daily chores, gong-gong! Laundry, afternoon dusting, but most of all because they offend Thee, Who art, gong!

And Santina remembered the dark side streets off Hilldale, far and velvet black from the Court as other worlds. You are walking with Angelo. You can barely see each other because the lampposts are like a mile apart, but you can smell the stuff on his hair that makes it so smooth and shining. His hand has you. It is summer. It is dance time, night time, bright wonderful summer time of your life. His hand feels like iron and Orange Blossom perfume in the same touch. His hand is a cool wind, a laugh, a tickle, a bruise you want. He kisses with a soft mouth that turns hard and sucking. His back is to press, his legs long and hard to dance, to push. His hand touches to paradise and back, back and back in a curved, rocketing plunge through black, warm air.

After the crying and the shouting, after the furious and murderous words, after the slap of hands beating her, there had been silence in the house. Mamma and Ross had sent her to bed; she could hear them in the basement, their voices rising and beating under the bedroom floor. In bed, she had watched the stars from the window, how they had seemed to make a green-white icy dance in the sky. Then she had drifted and drifted, sleeping.

In the morning, Mamma had screamed, "Well, who will the next one be! You are bad, bad." Her eyes were red from crying, Mamma who never cried.

After breakfast Mamma had said, "Come."

She had walked between Mamma and Ross to the corner, up Hilldale, down a side street, until they came to a big building within a fence. It was dark brick, gloomy, with fire escapes all over it. In a small, square niche above the door stood a tiny Christ dressed like a shepherd, with a tiny, tiny lamb in His arms. The sign inside the fence read: "Training School for Girls."

"Come," Mamma said, and she followed her and Ross into the building.

"Sit down," Ross whispered like he was screaming. His face was white and his nose looked funny, all thin and pinched. He and Mamma went to the desk. They talked to a Sister who was sitting there. Ross did most of the talking, and after a while Mamma began to cry.

Santina looked at the life-size Christ which stood in the room, the

calm face, the bleeding heart undraped on the stone flesh. On all the walls hung paintings of saints in bright colors. All the saints had tortured faces.

The world is full of sin, Santina thought. Pray for us.

Mamma and Ross came back. They were kissing her, Ross too. Funny to have your own brother's arms around you, hard, like a guy's arms. Mamma's hands were cold. Mamma and Ross were both crying.

"Santa, Santa," Mamma cried, "be good. Here you will be pure and good. My Santa, we will pray for you. Be pure in your little heart, then you will come back to us. Goodbye, goodbye!"

"Goodbye," Ross said hoarsely in English. "Don't be bad, Santina. Be a good girl."

Bad? Why am I bad? Santina thought. Is dancing bad? Is having a beer, and walking just like dancing in a dark street bad?

Mamma and Ross went away. She did not miss them. She and the Christ and the saints were all together for a minute. She began to shiver, but with excitement not with fear. A robe came near her; it had a pale, kind face. "Come with me, my child."

They walked. The hung, colored pictures of the saints were everywhere, and at the end of all the corridors were Christ statues, all of them sad, and now and then there was a statue of a sad saint, too.

Why, Santina asked the black robe ahead of her, is there only sadness everywhere? Why are all the Christs sad when all I want to do is laugh and dance? Am I really bad, like Ross says? Like Mamma says?

They walked. The windows had iron bars across them. There were girls in grey uniforms, who turned to watch her walk.

And Santina remembered the night time. During the day she was a girl who went to school, on Sunday to Mass. At home she learned how to cook peppers and tomatoes with meat, the way a man would like it, her husband some day. But then it was night, and school-church-cook Santina ran away to the secret place under the front porch. Ross would whistle for her, or Mamma would scream out of an upstairs window. Once she lay directly beneath Ross, where he was standing on the porch. She had to giggle to herself. There was Ross, whistling for her, and she in her hiding place that nobody but Angelo knew about. Let Ross whistle. Let the whole street blow up, with all of Mamma's curses and dark predictions of what the street was, but she would lie here laughing, waiting for Angelo in the night time.

Sister had a voice like little, soft tinklings of ice. "You are not

doing well, child. You do not permit yourself to learn. I am afraid you have a stubborn nature."

"Yes, Sister," Santina said, clasping her hands.

And she remembered the sound of cats that night, that Ross had found her. A hot night, the heat pouring like dark, heavy perfume.

Angelo and she in the hiding place. "Listen to those cats," he said. "Let's get the hell out of here." No, she would not move. She murmured his name, and from every house in the street her murmur was told again, repeated in some other woman's throat. The street was deep with ecstasy, the hours changing, vague to dark purple. She herself changed, from kiss to kiss becoming a more beautiful dancer, whirling from finger to finger of his hands like a butterfly dancer, ever deepening colors, ever slower flutter of wings.

Then Ross came home and found them. He screamed like crazy but in a whisper because of the neighbors, and he jumped like crazy, he was going to kill Angelo. Then Mamma came running, worse crazy. "Did you, did you!" she screamed, but whispering like Ross. "Ah, what did you do!" Santina watched Angelo running away, and the cats were still making those sounds all through the street.

In her room with the barred windows, during the praying period, Santina sat and hummed a song from the nickel music machine in the Blue Light Cafe. She looked at the saints on the walls, and they looked back at her.

No more Angelo, the saints said. Never, never again.

She would not believe them; and she quickly crossed herself at the thought. They were saints but she would not believe them.

She sat, not believing them, remembering the last movie she had seen at the Palace. Angelo had bought her a dime's worth of candy from the machine in the lobby, where you picked out what you wanted and then put in the money and turned the knob.

The movie was called "My Lady Danced." The people on all sides of her had gone away, and Angelo had gone away, and then she went. Into the big screen she went, and there she was, dancing better than anyone in the picture. The dancers swirled, in red and orange and rainbow costumes. She was the leader. She was like a flower, a bird. Santina, Santina! she heard little silver voices call. And there was no street, no barred windows, no Mamma or Ross, nothing but dancing and laughter in a great open place of night.

Santina, Santina! she heard little golden voices call. And she was floating in the never-ending warm soft hours of night.

# HORACE GREGORY:

## The Night-Walker

Artemis, Artemis: there is fading
Glory in her net, in the silver
Curtain that falls from sky to street.

Above roof and cornice her face
Returns behind the silver rain;
The ancient huntress walks across night.

Sleepless, she warns and charms,
Sees the new age fallen out of the old,
New ruins where elder cities stood. Indifferent

Is she to these; she has come to warn us
That her pale life, her sterile mountains
Have outlived wars. Her arrows are unspent,

They are still falling in silver light
Above, within the city, their shadows deeper
Than any shelter on the scarred walks of earth.

She is not of our being: she is wandering
Artemis who endures beyond life, she is
The light behind a cloud and has deceived
The unwary into an immoderate love of death.

## Spy-Glass

This is a spy-glass: it
Reads the deepest waters,
Reads the weather, it tells
The time of day, it pierces
Fog and cloud, it searches out
The moon, the sun; it is
A lidless eye, open at morning
And alive at night.

Touch it: even blind senses
Know its ceaseless stare,
How it looks inward to
The dark and how it gazes
Through the outer air.

It is
The spy-glass: it is now
Directed across the plain,
Over a broken bridge, into
The forest, through elm and pine,
Oak leaf and briar, a side of
Rock, a glint of water, the ivy
Vine — careful, the glass is very
Powerful, one can scarcely
Hold it — it has seen
Something that moves, that runs,
Throws itself flat,
Leaps, circles as if shot,
Stands upright, dives, yet cannot
Escape the glass. It is
Running, it has tripped, is
Running, it has grown smaller
Than its shadow, it has lost
Its shadow among the branches,
Among the leaves. The glass
Has caught its face; it is
What we thought it was, not quite
An animal — its pelt is fluttering
In rags — not quite a god;
It is not hard to know what
Its strange features mean:
It rises, falls again,
The disappearing man.

## Elizabeth at the Piano

It is memory speaking, preternaturally clear,
Awake, remote: the piano playing
Through the dark, midwinter afternoon,
The string-filled music at four o'clock,

Chopin, Mozart, Suppé.
What I remember
Of that lilac-breathing house
Are flames against dark windows,
And beyond the curtained door
A young girl seated at the square piano.

Listen: I hear
The walking metronome: one, two, one, two,
Then the minuet. It is the practice hour,
The pendulum swinging between the walls,
Upstairs and down.
There is the smell
Of wet lath, of rain-darkened plaster —

Behind the house the wintry lilac forest;
And behind the coals in the grate
The winter sunset smolders.
Is that flame

The sunset breaking through the fire?
One can almost hear the pendulum walk the stairs,
The lonely footfall, then the minuet.

Awake, remote, the house stands in grey-
Clouded brick, leaning through grey midwinter, sunset air,
The fire-light failing behind the curtained door.
And at the piano in the shadowed room
The dust-filled metronome
Clicks: it is the practice hour.
And is that face,
The sunset glancing through darkness
Over white and rose, and caught within
Moonlight of yellow hair, her face?
Is the child there?

Faintly, the minuet — or is that sound a bell
Ringing, unanswered, or someone calling
A child's name down the street?
The house looms, then fades in the wind;
It has begun to snow, the piano is glazed with sleet,
Then frost; it is snowing everywhere.

# AGNES W. MACDONALD:

## The Many Change and Pass

Jorgie not coming? A voice had said she would not be working any more. Maggie had just put down the receiver. And she had not asked why. She'd taken the incredible message like a robot. It must have meant not working tomorrow, not coming across the city on this ice. She looked out the dining-room window at the world wrapped tight in shiny cellophane.

No one had gone out today. The radio's repeated advice was quite superfluous. But tomorrow, Monday, would be different. Jorgie would come through anything to get to her work. The voice really had said not working any more. Not washing, cleaning, ironing . . . what would Jorgie be doing?

Had she imagined the phone's ring and come down in her sleep? The voice had been out of this world, all tongue and no teeth. She could see the way it looked, outlandish lips fumbling with a tongue. She must have dreamed it. If she had really heard she would have asked why Jorgie was not working any more.

That was it, why wasn't she? Compunctiously, Maggie wished she had not answered, for suddenly she could hear all the family coming — so they had heard the phone too. But they had not heard that voice. Anticipating judgment, she called out, and laughed unnaturally, that Mrs. Jorgenson wasn't coming any more.

"Any *more!*" Everyone of them — even Jack's wife Dora, who was only a visitor — said it with a frank mixture of unbelief and accusation.

Maggie shrugged her shoulders to make their ignorance common while they looked her over with chilling self-control, until something, probably their icebound state, made this new concern common too and they asked the only question.

Do you suppose she's dead?

Like a challenge, it restored their unity and there was no sting when they demanded Who called? So with humility and regret she confessed that being kind of out of breath from running down to answer she didn't really take in the meaning: a gluey voice said, This Moores'? and she said, Yes, and it said, Tell them Mrs. Jorgenson ain't workin no more, and she said, What? and it said, No; and that

was all she knew and next time they could answer the phone and see if they'd ask all the questions. Of course they would have she thought.

But just now, there was only the one question for all of them: was Jorgie dead?

And they went to work on it like an indoor treasure hunt. Someone flew about collecting leaves of the Sunday papers and sorting out the ones covered with accidents. They bent around over columns, bumping heads and mumbling nope, nope, then leaned apart in dubious relief. Dora, not having the family reason for restraint, ran all the talking. She kept trying to prove her own and disprove imaginary statements about Mrs. Jorgenson's looks, which, she said, had been bad the last time she'd seen her — in July! — as if she were silently fighting something, really quite haggish looking. Maggie could remember Jorgie's face only the way she liked it, the way it had always looked, which was not so plain just now . . . some old invisible wound . . . Maggie couldn't think up a face to accompany anything so vague. . . . In resentment against Dora, she turned on the radio. Maybe the news — it was mostly accidents. No. Only someone saying, For the story of the week for bravery. She listened a moment. A boy of seven had rescued his dog twice his size. Not a word about an old laundress. Maggie turned him off.

Once more, Dora wanted to know, how was the message given. Was the woman weeping sorely? Maggie said she wasn't sure it was a woman. Oh, and she hadn't asked — wasn't Mr. Jorgenson dead? Yes, he was. Who, then —?

Her mother said Mrs. Jorgenson had two sons, but they were married and could not keep her from her work, never had. Nothing could. Not even the birth of grand twins, twice, and then triplets recently. She'd left an hour early before the second twins came, was an hour late of coming the day the triplets were born. . . . They all listened just as if it had been on the radio and it was not only Dora who didn't know all of it. Then little Davy began chanting at Maggie to call Jorgie, call Jorgie, pronouncing the name with their usual gusty accent, which did not seem quite Jorgie's due if she were dead. To keep him quiet, she called Jorgie's home. They all waited.

"Is Mrs. Jorgenson there? Are *you* Mrs. Jorgenson? No, I mean Mr. Jorgenson's *mother* . . . Must be her daughter-in-law," she whispered. "She isn't? Can you tell me when she can work at Mrs. Moore's in Meriton Park? . . . She sounds toothless or — something. And boy, the screaming! Oh, she's not working *anywhere any more*. Why not? Is she ill? Not well? I mean is *she* sick? *Sick*. What? No? No.

I don't mean you. I mean, is Mrs. Jorgenson who works — is — is she a-*live?* You don't know yet. Is your husband there? Can he tell us?" Maggie hung up. "Well, she's not definitely dead. Funny the woman wouldn't know, or let her husband talk."

They said she asked all the right questions, and began to remind each other and inform Dora of Jorgie's record. This woman, Jorgie had said, announcing her second son's marriage a few months after "he had a nulment," wasn't much. When the first son, her idol, had disappointed Jorgie's expectation that he would be a minister, she had turned all her attention to this one. They said Jorgie's husband had died after he started drinking all the time, not bothering to explain it. They were saying whatever came back into their heads. Her mother knew the most. She liked to hear her mother tell it; she could see it clear and real then like a true part of her own life. She could see Jorgie's lower lip talking under her teacup, telling her opinions to Mother while she waited for the sugar to slide onto her tongue. It was the one thing she'd wait for the law of gravity to effect unaided. Dora was saying you'd give anything to have help like Mrs. Jorgenson and you'd begin to appreciate her fully now that she was gone. We appreciated her, Mother was saying; we've all depended on her for over nineteen years and she knew it, that's why — Was it that long! How tired the poor woman must have been. Mrs. Jorgenson didn't get tired, said her father. He knew; he sounded impatient with Dora. If Jorgie wasn't coming, who was going to find his knife, Davy was demanding of Jack, his dad. Just the kind of question they could all ask with variations, Maggie thought, and she noticed as Davy said, Jorgie, Jorgie, that the others were saying Mrs. Jorgenson.

Still feeling her inadequacy when taking the message, she promised to drive across the city to Jorgie's home the next day and learn all she could — ice or no ice. Her mother said she could take the boxes, meaning the empty egg cartons and dress and suit boxes that they always saved for Jorgie. She collected every kind of box, but those kinds especially. And she would tie them together miraculously to carry away with her; she would bob along between two monstrous-looking burdens, the family's varied cast-offs saved and packed artfully and sometimes suspiciously, like stockings wadded in egg cartons, everything evenly divided according to her equilibrist's sense of values. Maggie had often wanted to follow her up the street to see how she managed getting on a bus or streetcar.

To escape from the defense and criticism of Jorgie's life she set herself to the box-building task and with some awe as well as wonder

beheld the assortment of empty clothes clinging like a frieze along both walls of their broad back stairway. Tiers of empty soap boxes stood up in neat companies like sets of books. Match boxes, large, middle-sized, small, were grouped; some filled were closed; others, open like tiny drawers, waited like mite boxes for a penitent's offering. A packed suit box, corded determinedly, lay in the way like a sample job. On one side outfits like a sweater, slacks, a cap, one glove, etc., hung on a row of hooks waiting to become ensembles like those on the other wall. Maggie was bewildered by the combinations obviously intended: a lacy hat crushed on the neck of a gray lumberjack shirt a chiffon nightgown stringing down under it. . . . Was Jorgie serving some riotous Madame Tussaud? No! At supper, as if she could put some hope in a bribe, Maggie solicited donations to even up the silly ensembles. As they checked in their stuff with her, she had an odd feeling: the boxes would not change things.

Jane, as if addressing a ouija board, wished Maggie'd get Mrs. Jorgenson to come once more, to do her things, just for the last time. She was going to a convention and had been prodigal with her personal supplies, almost to please Jorgie. Her father said formally that the cause of such breach of habit must be compulsive, he trusted it was temporary. They could be sure it was compulsive, her mother said, and as temporary as imaginable; Mrs. Jorgenson had no choice for she loved to work more than anyone they knew; something had changed everything again.

Maggie promised to find out what it was.

2.

The next day, driving over to Jorgie's place, everywhere the melting ice changing the world, Maggie thought about the "shanges" in Jorgie's life. She started out with a glow, racing to a rescue. But there were unmelted stretches of pavement. At any rate, alone she could think of the past right and fair. It was about time, she speculated, for another change for Jorgie. But one that separated her from work would have to be mythical.

It had been a change for her when she began to work out after a long time of drudging for her husband and sons. She was past middle-age when she first came. They said she had told Mother in her staccato way, "My life shange. I leave Sweden; I come here. I marry my man. We got two kids yet. My little girl died. My man's getting no good now. I need to work again. I need to quick." She'd say "kavick." It and other words Maggie used to beg her to repeat as long as she

would. She had advertised herself as a "lady wishing housework willing to work."

And she worked . . . they could hardly stop her. That first time, she recalled because of the argument, Jorg argued Mother into letting her come on a Saturday when there was not going to be anyone at home to make up a day when she had stopped work early. In a blur, she could see them entering their house . . . expecting cleanliness, they had walked into purification. The boys used forbidden words and a strange one, fumigated, and pinched their noses; Father shushed them and Mother said ammonia.

When he would hear she was still around at dinner time, Father, amused at first, would say let her alone, she'd learn soon how much was enough. But one early evening shake-up and he made it plain she was to do any overtiming during the daylight. He had tackled her for a prowler when she reared up her back parts from under the piano; they went rolling about in the dimness like a couple of bears and Jorgie, luckily on top when they stopped, saved them both by getting it out that she was "yust finishing off a yob." How for one terrible minute they feared, until Father moved. . . . Her brothers waiting into forgetfulness for her to find things. Even when their lost prizes were to her unimaginable, she would watch and memorize their demonstrative descriptions, then, some time, would produce a toy accordion or maybe only a piece of an airplane wing, and take a second's reward in their astonishment. The boys believed she knew spells . . .

The family routine and tempo she made authoritative. You could see, reviewing it like this, that she had found one setting for her regularity and industry; and she was settled. Changes that moved any of them beyond her service she mistrusted . . . the stoic farewells to the boys when they married. With an alarming abruptness her own two boys turned into men. Taking her coffee, she would tell Mother about them all the time at first, then less and less, then only her chief vexations. The marriage that was annulled. She hated that business, being mystified by the cancellation. The woman that "wasn't much." A boy, a sickly child; twins — twice. "Too many babies — when they don't work," she would say. "They gotta shange." Yet Jorgie herself did not change her ways, much. An hour before or after a normal day. She resented intrusions. "I don't like shanges." Her slogan. "You never shange here." Their changes had been planned, for generations it seemed to Maggie.

"I would not shange places with you," she would say from the

floor when Jane came home from her desk, and would sit back on her heels as if on a special little eminence. But "I would shange my back life if I could come over," she admitted to Mother one day. "I grieved long time because God took my little girl away but now I tank Him. If I had my time to come again, I would not have no little girl. I would not have no children. My husband he got children but he never took no interest in them. Children is work." Her testimonial, and it left on her a gauntness you had never separated from your vision of a martyr. . . . Even after her husband died she came. His death was sudden. And she said, "Shanges comes quick to me." A change for the better. Maggie remembered the family saying "less grim" "less withering," but for her Jorgie had neither withered nor freshened.

Then her family created another drain: triplets.

"I leave them alone; I did not go to the hospital." She had sounded frighteningly hostile in the kitchen. But before her next day she weakened and with a trace of defiance had asked for the newspaper that printed the birth story with a photograph of the mother and the three babies in bed; guessed it was something to be on the front page, something like those five — you know. However, mistrust lurked; she was not missing a day's work for all her son's wife's prestige, and the next week with a smirk reported the receipt of no gifts of account. "They only wait for things to come," she snapped. "They don't work at all. They don't get no more." She had left without any boxes that day.

From then on, Maggie could see now, she had put all her energy into tubs and irons; the old persuasive voice they did not hear except maybe in a moment with Davy or of a rare emotional surprise. Same way with her eyes; once alternately soft or sharp like a tamed Viking's, now settled in sharpness.

Before this special effort to perceive, Maggie would have seen only rows of days of one favorite unchanging Jorgie: like a magician she used to keep her enchanted, as she made the iron skate expertly in swoops and pokes creating a playsuit from a crumpled cotton ball. Always, while a little girl watched, she chanted as she put "yust one more smooth," "and yust one more smooth," "and . . ." And instead of flattening hopelessly any decorative touch like smocking she would tip the iron on its point and set it twirling through the mazes of a pattern like a ballerina. Then, presto, she would hold up the article as if her fingers pinned it on an imaginary line, saying, "Yust like one doll clothes." With the memory came back a sensation, one of being

looked quite through even though the eyes had the soft light, quite through as if she had not been there in the flesh . . . a weird feeling of vanishing under Jorgie's power . . . her clothes and Jorgie's charms both changed imperceptibly. Yet that sturdy person still seemed possessed of some nameless indestructible quality that she put into her works and that was herself. Maggie could not see the current person. . . .

She was passing an old empty building with whirling circus ads pasted on the windows, and found that right next to it was Jorgie's place. Small, of course, and plain, but distinguished by its neatness.

Up the three steps of the brief porch, her clumsy collection of boxes stacked about her, and she suddenly had a sense of bribery and effrontery. She forgot her embarrassment when nobody answered her knock. She pulled dangerously at the ice-sealed storm door, stepped into the dry wedge it made on the porch floor and rapped with the force of alarm. This brought a response, a man, who propped the inside door open with his upper body while he finished wiping his hands and mouth on a cloth.

"Well —" as if nothing could surprise him. While he was sighting something (the boxes) and looking back at her as if she must be going to try to sell him something maybe, she was deciding that, lean, harried, sort of loafy in manner, he probably was that prolific son. "I came to see Mrs. Jorgenson, your mother," without impressing him. He was listening backwards. Absurdly close, she raised her voice: "We're wondering why she isn't coming to our place, to Mrs. Moore's, to work any more. We need her awfully. Is she here?"

"O-h-h; well, no." He stopped propping the door, so she could see all of him and hear more of a whooping commotion beyond the hall. "Nooo-o. NOOO!" His petulant answer to a threatening demand that made her picture heads with faces redly impatient, the mouths stretching and throats blaring beyond any human strength, for the bodies would break vocal chords rather than move. "Is zat Mutt bac? Izz ittt? Izz zat Mutt? Izzz itttt?" "She's in the hospital. They tole us Genral Hospital." He said it as if she couldn't have heard the other voices.

"I thought she wasn't sick. Your wife said —"

Dingy young boys nearly the same size fought each other from the noisy room into the small dark hall behind the man, and he turned, annoyed. Agreeing, evidently by instinct, that she was somebody funny, they crowded together for brief convulsive bursts, spurting blobs of food from their mouths, jumping about to save it in hands

already crammed and dripping.

"Go back in," the man said with an imitation Jorgian sharpness, and without noticing him, they shifted back together slightly and kept on juggling their food.

"Git back in till yer done," louder, darting the way you might at a stray hound, and flipping the cloth with a snap — to no avail.

"What happened to your mother?" she asked, louder too.

"Guess she got knocked down gittin off the streetcar when it was slippery, it ain't no use talkin about her workin yit, mebbe never." He seemed used to yelling.

Screaming Wh-oo is-s-s i-i-t? a stumpy girl led into view more little cretinish beings, all eating with all hands, and bundled lumpily.

Suddenly the entire collection gawked in a stupid silence.

Hardly glancing at them, the father said, "I don know what we'll do neither." It seemed like something to say. And though Maggie remembered Jane's special message, she said nothing about her laundry . . . Compared to his need, their total need was negligible. She just looked back toward the porch and said she had brought the boxes and things Mrs. Jorgenson had left on the backstairs. He mumbled they'd jest hafta lay round till — something like "yanta" — came.

Together they lifted them inside. "Thanks," he said. "Git back! . . . they's Yanta's!" as the boys made to grab and banged the door back against the wall. It raised a thumping above. Only something unthinkable like an elephant —

"Does somebody else — besides — besides your mother, live here? Is there anything?" she asked foolishly.

"A-a-well, we might as well now if she ain't. There's up and down."

Conscious of a new darkening of the hall, the small window on the stairway being suddenly blocked, Maggie looked and beheld "Her." The one surely that Jorgie had said wasn't much. She stood up there as if on display like some caged mythological creature ready at any moment to repeat the miracle whose triple results dangled before her bosom like medals put on at a fair. Primitive sounds and smells began to descend from her. She hoisted the heads higher, then grinned above them, as if for a photographer, uncovering vacant oblongs through her mouth. . . . Those flabby mumblings on the phone.

"At General Hospital," said Maggie; and "Oh — yah! my ma," said the man as if remembering why she was there.

As one, their dumb figures pushed forward and jammed the door as she closed the outside one. She did not look back at the place.

3.

Jane went with Maggie to the hospital. They moved in a crowd through wide double doors of a ward and down a wide aisle between two long rows of single ghostly beds as between two rows of tombs. On the next to the last bed lay the figure of Jorgie, in rigid flatness. Even when they stopped and Jane said hello and her name, it only stared. An unorthodox mixing of death and work and rest and vague states of body was rising in Maggie; yet she heard words in Jane's voice, ". . . Jorgie." Then, You? the figure looked. Finally, "You," she whispered as if telling herself what was in a dream. Hello; Maggie smiled it. So changed and helpless and aged like a celebrated beauty cut off from every factory-made aid. Suddenly sparse, too-long-unwashed gray hair streamed stiffly back from forehead and temples. Like Gulliver, she must in unconsciousness have been secured by captors, but unlike him she was the pigmy.

It was like listening to a voice inside a battered effigy to hear her, immovable, tell all about her accident and her refusal at first to admit her impotence to get up and go on to her day's work. The voice mourned her absence from tubs and boards, and then stopped.

When Maggie said, "It's tough," it sounded ridiculous.

The voice went on about the broken bones she had. Jane listened too as if they must let Jorgie run down. It used a combination of butcher and midwife vocabularies. Or maybe she'd heard the doctors through her unconsciousness. The confusion of collarplate and utabus — and her pevick yoints split yust acrost both tights — and other impossibilities, meant she was doubly disabled. They should see the very board she was fixed together on she kept telling them, but they didn't want to. And for once they had the advantage over her perseverance. They tried to go. No. They had to hear the fill-in details, then the story again and again.

Of course they did not think about her getting back to work. But she did: "I'm here I don know how long — but not how long they think. I get up — I walk out on em." Her eyes glinted over her own vision and promise of escape. They could not catch it. It was fantastic to hear her talking about the food how it looked grand, "like in a svell hotel" but she couldn't swallow it; her body moved when she said her work — she wanted to get back to it; she needed it. Yes — when they both said no.

They touched her clawish hands a moment.

She was trying to put on her old soft expression . . . "I'm proud

you came," in the old-time low coaxing voice that made them children again and her really Jorgie.

They went home to report the details and to begin calling up about domestic help. Jorgie would be laid up for months.

4.

A half-sister of Jorgie's took her place. She phoned late one morning in the third week without Jorgie and after a dismal report of the patient's helplessness offered herself, and, welcomed on faith, said she'd try to be a "fittin successor." And over she came. It was probably the difference between the two that gave rise to the notion that Jorgie had been an illusion. For Maggie especially. The half-sister said, as if Jorgie had died, that they had had the same father. Nothing visible was the same.

The new one looked a lot younger, bigger every way physically, buxom. Her sprightly get-up suggested a hankering after a changing, public-speaking kind of life. It set you guessing what she had in mind: grand scale cafeteria, inbetween sort of opera, glamorized auction, circus performer —? She came "dressed." A half-hat, or coronet, rose in an arch of spokes protected by stiff petals over her forehead; her whole get-up thick. Voluntarily she promised to see that the work got done. She knew about everything, even the boxes and how to pack them. She "called it a day" at four o'clock and re-dressed herself.

She was still a novelty in her fourth week. She came, but the family were never sure she'd make it. She gave regularly the impression that she had just avoided a freak collision and that somehow escape was related to their belief in her. They were thankful to have her for the household operations requiring large careless movements; but she ironed blindly and cleaned ineffectually. She would puff when in motion — coming on like the oil-burner — so that they always knew her location.

That fourth week, Maggie asked, in routine manner, How is Mrs. Jorgenson?

"Oh, her; she's left the hospital," the woman said in a hurry and without joy. "Couldn't make her stay. She's at her sister's. Her full sister's. No phone there."

Not at her own house?

Well, n-no. It was full tight. They wouldn't know but Jorg didn't need to work hadn't needed to for years why she'd never stand over a board like she did if she had a little of all Jorg saved workin and sellin — she sold high all her collections — never took it easy daggered

around if they tried to threatened to be running her own house again some time. She'd oughta have a lyin still job. Wy she even talked about getting back to these old places!

Lyin still? No! Even after a visit Maggie did not think of her so. And now that she'd got up. She could not see her up either. Shanges came quick to her . . .

Changed into a cool, blue, softly full-skirted dirndl dress, the woman was waiting for someone to come for her and the boxes she was clearing out of the way so they would have room on the hooks for their winter cast-offs, and, perched companionably on the top of a high kitchen stool so that she could watch the driveway, her spoked coronet pushed back on her neck, a newspaper cone protecting a bouquet of early narcissus across her knees she suggested the Goddess of Liberty off duty.

When a feeble truck rattled into the driveway and its driver yelled Ya-an-ta-a! so hard that they could hear him in the house, she stepped down and supervised the transfer.

Then she began to send substitutes; she had promised to get the work done: first, though of course the family didn't know it, came a woman who did not set foot in the house, afraid to come past the Scottie's fierceness; another who employed herself so mysteriously that at five o'clock she had to leave the clothes unhung; a woman-with-two-children, one of which imprisoned the other in an old discarded cabinet radio and got everyone worked up to the anguish of a crime in the house before the discovery; a man who'd try the business!

Then she herself came again — to check on the work, and to pick up the boxes.

Maggie heard her mother insisting that the half-sister must not send any more substitutes, that her duty did not extend so far. If she had to miss a day, they'd wait, they'd manage. And they did. When Jack etcetera came for a visit, they waited in vain.

The next morning — uncivilizedly early — Maggie heard Tammas' alarm barking. At once several voices directed anyone else to see who it was. Everyone only listened.

"Somebody better go," her father's voice announced. "Maybe that woman."

Couldn't be — so early. Another of her freaks? Ominous end of the barking. Had she gassed the dog? She'd had a key. Must be stopping in the kitchen the way she never did, instead of going dutifully downstairs until she was coaxed back up for her cup of coffee.

First into the shower, Maggie heard them all: If another sub, the

boldest one yet — that was Jane. Somebody better go — Father again. Ready in a minute now — Mother. Aren't some of you up yet? — Dora!

Maggie called to Davy, impatiently bumping about in the hall, to see who it was while she pulled on some essentials. She heard him zoom down the stairs. Straining, she could hear low jerky talking. Exasperating not to make it out. And then — the telephone! Somebody bet — Father once more. Can't *an*ybody slip on something — faster! — Jane again.

"I'm going." Maggie felt like yelling. She flounced perilously down the stairs, wound in a towel. "Davy! Who *is* it?"

Flying on his toes not seeming to touch the floor he was at the stairs before she could rise up on the landing and loosen her wrappings. "Maybe it's that J-o-o-rg!" He was confused but kept his voice within a whisper and spoke with raised shoulders, head projected as if he knew there was a predicament that would have to be managed furtively.

"Jorg?" She shouted in a whisper. "It can't be. On the phone?"

Who is it? all the voices were wanting to know. Jane at the top of the stairs in slack shirt. The others shaking the floor grabbing clothes and things.

"He says it's Jorg maybe; do you supp —" She threw off the towel and raced past the ringing phone to the still dark kitchen.

Yes. There was a — Ye-ss. There she was: Jorg. Come to work. Standing up, waiting, trying to hear beyond the jangling phone . . . Shrunken, she could see, but it was Jorg. It seemed as if she had not really looked at Jorgie until that minute. She still had her hat on, a plump circular topper of Maggie's own, one donated that day she went to find out why Jorgie didn't come, her head holding it up but not filling it out so that it appeared to be following her like a saintly halo. Her arms hidden in the sleeves of a coat someone had outgrown. Against one side lay the shape of her giant handbag; down the other, her empty reticule sprawled. Like an old diploma, securely rolled up and pressed under one arm, the work-dress bundle showed her intentions.

She stood a-thrill at the astonishment that came rushing in. Jack peered over Jane while he went on putting himself together; and Dora, who had stopped the phone's ringing, approached emphatically, the only one articulate; and all she kept saying was Extraordinary, Really, Amazing. Bowled over by the voluntary return of a laundress to a heavy job? That's how they looked. To her it was almost like a

resurrection. That changeling wasted Jorg up off that board she was fixed on here intending to begin bending reaching kneeling climbing transforming — it took magic her imagination kept for dreamy stuff and spirits. But there was the woman, full size again, some flesh as well as bones, ready. "Shall I wash first?" without saying I'm here, or It's sure me, or anything preliminary like that to admit a break in her old routine. Jane with a sort of cooing murmur was forward and putting her hands on Jorgie's upper arms as if to find any muscle. Embarrassing hesitation. Dora warning: "The other one's phoned she ain't comin no more."

"No. She ain't comin no more." Jorg's voice had power; her eyes, the Viking glint. "Her man's got yobs again. She got enough with her rummage store. Too much."

"Oh, that's not it," Jane said in her real voice too. "You, are you able to —?"

"Sure, I'm able. I cleaned my place. I shanged them back." She pumped up the old coat the way you start to make those giant balloons take shape, as if she'd been big in a big job.

"I've put the coffee on," said Dora from the stove.

Settlement — warning, accepting, mutual wanting — was pleasantly in the air.

Davy had flown upstairs with the story; so by the time the others reached the kitchen their disbelief had turned into solicitude. Her father began playful advice that Jorgie oversee work now; but, shaking hands, he said she could suit herself. Mother moved her over to a chair to sit down while a breakfast was being assembled.

"Can't sit. I'll be late startin. And I spose you need cleanin all through." Her stern position about dirt sent currents through the room.

They laughed, sort of unstrungly. She got ready to stay.

She stayed and worked. At dinner time Maggie got to the kitchen for her parting remarks. Jorgie had finished her story again, fall, treatments, recovery; Mother was saying a great help before the summer — work . . . no work . . .

"Work never hurt nobody. Everybody oughta work and never quit. . . ." She held on to her words as she tied tighter the knots securing a box. "Nope, never qu-it." She pulled the strings into one hard center as unmovable as her conviction, and looked toward Maggie and jerked her head up as if she'd proved something.

"Does your son's family —?" Timidly, maybe fearing she might not return to them. Maggie began some question. Jorgie now at the

close of a day of work to be pushing into the small dark hall stuffy with that swelling woman and more and more stupid figures and . . . the picture was blocking the words.

"They got my upstairs now." She was both resigned and resolute. "I cleared them up there. At night I am alone." Words separate as in an oath. "Yah. Work all day and at night I don't want nobody." Adjusting two pyramids of baggage. "Then I think out ahead and do like you, get set for my shange." The weights apparently being right, she moved practicedly through the door and turned. "I don't like to shange. I don't think I shange no more."

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## CHARLES H. SHATTUCK:

## The Spreading Whimsy

CHRISTOPHER FRY: *The Lady's Not for Burning.* Oxford.

CHRISTOPHER FRY: *Venus Observed.* Oxford.

If one reads these two works in the order of their writing, the second, *Venus Observed,* is likely to seem a pretty good play, the writing pretty good writing. The opening situation has wit and charm: an aging romantic widower, wanting to marry again, calls together three of his old flames and prevails upon his twenty-five-year-old son to re-enact the role of Paris and choose one of them for him by handing her an apple. There is a good curtain-kicker to the first act: the old fellow throws over the rules of the game and hands the apple to a pretty young girl (an unexpected visitor) and she pulls a gun out of her handbag and shoots the apple right out of his fingers. The second act contains a symbolically sexy archery lesson between the old fellow and the pretty young girl, which takes a surprising turn when the son scores a *bull's eye* from twice the distance, shooting dangerously across his father's shoulder. Thereafter the pretty young girl goes *shooting fish alone* and then hospitably suggests that the three of them "all shoot together." The house burns down — still in the second act— and the old fellow and the pretty young girl are rescued from the top-floor observatory by a pair of comical men-servants. The third act adds no more startling developments, but quietly talks the complications down to some sort of acceptable ending.

Comparatively speaking, the characters are faithful to themselves, and they speak with separate voices to purposeful ends, and the fable seems to start somewhere and go somewhere else in a more or less disciplined manner. One is even pleasantly enmeshed at times in a sequence of wit.

Wit, however — or rather the compulsion to wit — is Mr. Fry's undoing. This forty-odd-year-old "young poet" writes and prints the precious verbal

monkeyshines of a precocious British schoolboy. The talk is loaded with schoolboy (or schoolmaster) references to classical mythology, historical figures and legends, literary history, Empire geography, comical English place names and the like. The title itself is of course a boyish pun on *Venice Preserv'd*, and the pun hasn't an ounce of significance. Oddly enough Mr. Fry seems perfectly aware of his sillinesses, even to the point of naming them before parading them. "I'm over-run by the most curious thoughts" is the legend of one speech, which grows curiouser and curiouser as it goes on. "Where did he learn those terrible words?" is another remark — the play is loaded with such smart polysyllables as "eschatological," "corybantic," "lithontriptical," "equine equability," "operculated," and "supercherify with chousery." The widower says at one point, "My original syntax, like original sin, grows vastier in the dark." That's revolting enough, between pun and bookishness, but read on. Two pages later the pretty young girl fulfills this proposition by making a sentence about how to make sentences, which itself is forty-four lines long. When she's done, they discuss the *punctuation* of it. As for Mr. Fry's "characteristic richness of imagery" (dust jacket), he is capable of such extravagances as "The mouth of the moon has already begun to munch."

*The Lady* was written earlier, before some tasteful critic applied the knife to Mr. Fry's weedy style (could this be Laurence Olivier, who had to *speak* the second play?) I wish we could forget it, forgive it, and let it go. But this is the play on which Fry's reputation is popularly based, so it must be reckoned with. This embarrasses me as a reviewer, for with all the good will I can muster, I cannot endure to read it a second time.

The "poetry" of it is unbearably literary, self-conscious and obtrusive. No one since the author of *Beowulf* has contrived such busy alliterations — they make my teeth itch. No one but a manic adolescent could dump from the box so many ill-sorted metaphors. It all reminds one very much of T. L. Beddoes (as William Arrowsmith has mentioned lately in *The Hudson Review*) — an awful thing to say about a poet in the theatre.

The obtrusiveness is the worst of it. The characters are never allowed to say what they need to say in their own or any human language, but there is the gadfly poet-prompter at their elbows, forcing them to say it his own queer way. Thus, to get drunk is to be "on the way to a faintly festive hiccup." When Alizon is sun-blinded, she can't stop with saying that she's "all out at the eyes" (which is odd enough), but must go on until she's used up all of Mr. Fry's present store of "white doves paddling in the sunshine," "a shower of broken glass," a biblical reference to the cymbals playing while David danced, and " a cloud of Catherine wheels." While Mr. Fry's whimsy spreads itself, the stage waits. To grow angry is to "burst my bud of calm and blossom into hysteria." To embrace a girl is to "impose on her the boundary of his two arms." To signal with a look becomes "a mere clouding of your unoccupied eyes, madam." A short time becomes "the extent of a tut." A man sleeping is "having his pomposity of snobjoy snores." This collection of "poetical beauties" from the early pages should suggest the crooked-minded wilfulness with which the author infests every part of the play.

In the decorum and economy of the theatre it is understood that the play-

wright may never ask the actor to work for, or the audience to listen to, himself alone. The play is the thing, and the play is the well-owned property of the whole community. Aeschylus learned this, Sophocles knew it perfectly, and Euripides lost the prize more often than he won because he tried to violate it. Shakespeare and Molière were perfect masters in the art of significant statement from dead-pan anonymity. In our own time even the open propagandists, like Shaw and Brecht and Pirandello, have learned to trick out their ideas through scene and character so that on the stage they seem to be the compulsive expression of the community. T. S. Eliot is an arcanic poet, but in his plays he never flaunts his mysteries; he buries them deep in a sound dramatic construction; he puts the play first and does not advertise himself.

Humility and self-effacement are the lessons that Mr. Fry has yet to learn.

Probably he can do it. The *Venus* shows a considerable advance over *The Lady*. And even in *The Lady* he seems almost conscious of what he is doing wrong. The following lines from the text of that play seem to me to represent it and evaluate it precisely:

> What a wonderful thing is metaphor. . . .
>
> You bubble-mouthing, fog-blathering
> Chin-chuntering, chap-flapping, liturgical,
> Turgidical, base old man! . . .
>
> I'm too tired to know what anyone's saying. . . .
>
> The whole thing's a lot of amphigourious
> Stultiloquential fiddle-faddle. . . .

It must be remembered that long ago William Shakespeare, that "upstart crow," who never blotted a line but should have blotted a thousand, wrote some plays as bad as these and in the course of them shocked the English language into new patterns that seem to last forever. Mr. Fry is at least as careless and ebullient as Shakespeare. I hope he may grow up as rapidly.

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